

THE CLASSIC COMEDY MAGAZINE COMIQUE

Volume I, Number I

Autumn 2020





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ON THE COVER: A rare original color photograph of comedians Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel on the backlot at Hal Roach Studios in Culver City, California. May 1938. The three original 5 x 7 inch black and white separation negatives (Y-C-M = yellow, cyan, magenta) were digitally scanned, combined, and realigned to create this image. Photo and restoration courtesy of Robert McKay.





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WELCOME

I have always been obsessed with classic comedy. When I was a kid, growing up in the 1970s and '80s, it seemed to be everywhere!

Vintage cartoons and comedies were a staple of broadcast television -- it was a wonderland for fans of Laurel and Hardy, Our Gang, The Three Stooges, Abbott & Costello, The Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields, Popeye, Bugs Bunny, et cetera.

Old time radio (OTR) programs were still airing regularly, treating new generations to the brilliance of Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Bergen and McCarthy, Fibber McGee and Molly, and so many others.

Book, record, and collectible stores were plentiful, offering up countless biographies, film and collectible magazines, fanzines, soundtracks, and other memorabilia dedicated to our comedy heroes.

Mystical companies like Blackhawk and Castle Films made it possible for us to own 8mm and 16mm prints of our favorite titles, and the advent of home video brought us even greater viewing freedoms. It was a truly glorious time!

Today, things look a bit different. There are more vintage comedies available than ever before, but they have essentially vanished from broadcast television. Cable, streaming, and online services are left to carry the torch. Books, audio recordings, fan clubs, libraries, and archives have all gone digital as well. But of the many wonderful print magazines dedicated to retro comedy, few have made the techno-leap. Historian David B. Pearson and I decided to pool our resources and do something about it.

This digital magazine, created with considerable help from some extraordinarily talented friends, is our loving tribute to the masters who have provided us with over a century of laughter. Enjoy!

Yours for fun,
Paul E. Gierucki

So what is *Comique*? Literally, "Comique" is a French word that translates into English as "Comic" or "Comedian." So being a magazine about classic comedy — and the performers that were its exponents — this would seem a reasonable title.

However, those more savvy about comedy films will recognize *Comique* (Co-MEEK-ee) as the small studio created by Roscoe Arbuckle in 1917 that featured himself, Al St. John and other comedians of some note (like Luke the Dog). This journal *isn't* about *that* troupe (although both Paul E. Gierucki and I are *not* unfamiliar with these guys).

And yet, Roscoe Arbuckle and *his* Comique really *is* what this is all about.

Roscoe was always about the "Big Tent," meaning never to discourage the contributions of others with comedy ideas. Arbuckle believed that more comedy in a production generally led to a better final product. It's a trait that allowed him to share the screen with most of his great silent contemporaries, either as co-star, or as director.

Here, we too believe in the "big tent." In fact, we believe in a VERY BIG tent. This includes work about not only the comedy workers of silent and pre-1966 sound films, but also those in vaudeville, animation, old time radio, and early television of the mid 20th century (and sometimes a bit beyond). And all of it is done with humor and joy.

So hail to them, hail to you dear reader, and hail to our beloved muse Thalia.

Enough of this. Let's get on with the show!

David B. Pearson





Charlie Chaplin Archive

Explore Charles Chaplin's very own and painstakingly preserved professional and personal archives on a user-friendly site for fans, researchers, academics, students and cinephiles. Photographs, poems, scripts, letters, contracts, production reports and much, much more.

Visit www.charliechaplinarchive.org/en



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BILLY BEVAN

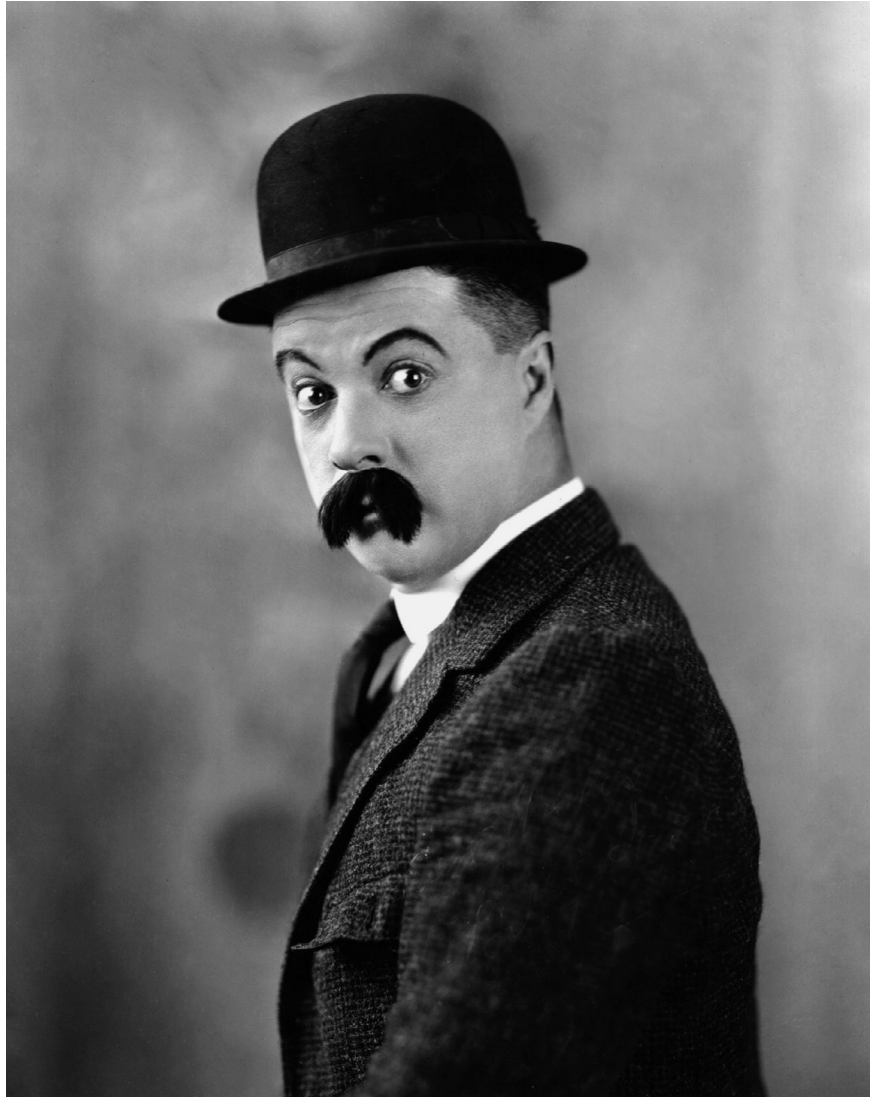
Pantomime and Pratfalls: Billy's Busy Career

By Lea Stans

With a small derby perched on his egg-shaped head and a drooping, well-defined mustache, Billy Bevan was once one of the most recognizable faces in silent comedy. A popular and reliable two-reel star in his time, today he's overshadowed by the more famous screen clowns. But perhaps he wouldn't mind too much, because while he may be overshadowed, if you study silent comedy he's nearly impossible to overlook. Using his precise comic timing to support more well-known comedians, working his way up to the status of a featured two-reel star, and then making a graceful transition to a reliable character actor, Bevan ended up having a respectable career that many wannabe-clowns tried (and often failed) to achieve.

While his screen appearance seemed like he walked out of the funny papers, Bevan (the name rhymed with "seven") was an Australian native. He was born in 1887 in Orange, New South Wales, a town where his grandfather had apparently been the mayor. Knowing since childhood that acting was his destiny, he started performing on stage at a young age and then spent nearly a decade appearing in operettas, billed as "Willie Bevan." He would join Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company, which specialized in children's acting troupes that toured different countries. The company's standards were high, wanting its young performers to know dozens of operas by heart. Fellow Lilliputians would include Snub Pollard and Daphne Pollard (they adopted "Pollard" for their screen names) who, like Bevan, ended up working for Mack Sennett.

In 1912, Bevan's troupe sailed to America. The new continent must have seemed agreeable, for he stayed on and appeared on stages throughout the U.S. and Canada. By the mid-1910s it was inevitable that he would start trying his luck in films. It's thought that he first appeared onscreen around 1915 in comedies filmed at the Norbig studio (a studio-for-rent not far from the Keystone Film Company). But Bevan's first appearances we can confirm



Billy Bevan

were in Alice Howell comedies filmed by L-KO — specifically, the role of Count von Garlic in *The Double's Troubles* (1916). Small roles in *Gaby's Gasoline Glide*, *A Bold, Bad Breeze*, *Lizzie's Lingering Love* (all 1916) and other alliterative titles followed where he supported players like Billie Ritchie and was paired with ingenue Lucille Hutton. He adopted a new screen name, "Billy Bevan," which was a snappier version of his birth name William Bevan Harris.

His stint at L-KO was followed by brief stints at Fox, the Caulfield Photoplay Company, Southern California Production Co. and Century (where he and Dot Farley gamely supported the Century Lions). But in 1919 he had ascended to where he arguably belonged: the Mack Sennett studio.

Bevan arrived at the Fun Factory at a good time. The frantic one-reelers of the mid-1910s, replete with tumbling cops and brick-throwing romantic ri-

vals, had given way to the more moderately paced two-reelers of the late Edwardian era. Rather than just being another bouncing, pratfalling figure caught up in wild chase scenes, Bevan had more time to show off his extensive pantomime skills. And much like Charlie Chaplin, he had developed an instantly recognizable look. Fairly nondescript in person, Bevan simply had to darken his eyebrows with a few swipes of a makeup pencil, add two long tufts of a mustache, and *voilà*, a comedian sprung forth. (Bevan shared this transforming power of comic makeup with other naturally nondescript performers like Snub Pollard and Chester Conklin.)

Bevan's first Sennett appearance was in *Treating 'Em Rough* (1919) starring Louise Fazenda, where he had a small role as a minister. This began a whirlwind of small parts in short after short, where he usually played hired hands, butlers, or crooks. In 1920 he was given more featured roles, often as Fazenda's hubby or love interest in shorts like *Bungalow Troubles* and *Astray from Steerage*. By 1921 he was a featured "Sennett comedian."

Next to funny faces like Ben Turpin, Bevan was one of the busiest stars on the lot during the 1920s. Two directors he worked with frequently were Roy Del Ruth, later known for '30s musicals and gangster dramas, and Del Lord, destined to one day direct the Three Stooges. Lord in particular loved cartoony gags and big, elaborate auto stunts, crafting scenes where Bevan single handedly pushed an endless chain of cars down the road in *Super-Hoop-*



er-Dyne Lizzies (1925), or lead a wild chase ending with his car getting squished like an accordion in *Wandering Willies* (1926). Thanks to Lord, in *Wandering Willies* Bevan was also the first to perform the famed "live oyster soup" gag later made famous by the Stooges. In *Ice Cold Cocos* (1926), Bevan also performed gags filmed at the same endless concrete steps that would be a pivotal part of *The Music Box* (1932).

Whether he was being dangled in the sky by piano wires, sprayed with hoses or locked in battle with clever oysters, Bevan was a breezy, likable presence no matter what absurd situations surrounded him. His character was a little cleverer than the usual happy dumbbell or energetic go-getter so prevalent at the time, reacting to mayhem with a twitch of his mustache or wiggle of his eyebrows. Cartoony shorts like *Gymnasium Jim* (1922), where Bevan works in a garage stylized like a slapstick version of German Expressionism, were a fine complement to his impeccable comic timing.

He frequently played blue collar workers or hobos, often alongside fellow Sennett stalwart Andy

Clyde. Mildly risqué gags (in today's estimation) pop up in a number of Bevan's films, such as a scene in *Galloping Bungalows* (1924) where a falling wall blows off some young ladies' dresses (revealing bathing suits, they being the Bathing Beauties and all), and a gag in *Wall Street Blues* (1924) where Bevan's vacuum whisks off a girl's stockings. More adult situations popped up in his late 1920s "Tired Businessman Series," such as the short *Pink Pajamas* (1929) involving a lingerie mixup and Bevan stuck in a girl's bedroom at precisely the wrong time. His professionalism and comical expressions seemed to keep kinds of gags from going too far for 1920s audiences.

Despite his packed schedule, Bevan was able to work out short term contracts with Sennett so he could freelance in occasional features like Madge Bellamy's *The White Sin* (1924), murder mystery *Easy Pickings* (1927) starring Anna Q. Nilsson, and John Ford's *Riley the Cop* (1928) with J. Farrell MacDonald and Louise Fazenda. These appearances helped establish Bevan as a character actor, which would be vital to his career once talkies came in.

Like many fellow actors, Bev-





The Forward Fall



The left leg leaves the ground



Both feet take the air



The hands take the impact



an's career wouldn't be the same once talkies arrived. He continued appearing in shorts in the 1930s and adopted a more natural look--basically meaning a bushier, less defined mustache. (He had tried removing the mustache in some of his later silents, but audiences weren't having it.) By this point, however, his days of being a featured star were over, and he turned increasingly to small character roles and being comic relief. In one of his rare interviews, he told the *Los Angeles Times*: "Slapstick has not gone out, but it is incorporated now in the dramatic film and is all the more outstanding because of the contrast...The gags that comedies considered too old and worn for further usage are now thought to be great as relief in a heavier sort of picture." The remainder of his career would be a grab-bag of bit parts, sometimes in prestige pictures. He might turn up as a ticket-taker in Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) or a constable in *National Velvet* (1944). Occasionally he nabbed something more substantial like the soldier Hale in *The Lost Patrol* (1934). And while he was actually Australian, he would often portray a Cockney.

Bevan's offscreen life kept him nearly as busy as the cameras. In 1924 he bought a 40-acre ranch in Escondido, about 100 miles from Hollywood. Married since 1917 to Leah Leona Kohn (they would have two daughters), in 1931 he moved his family to the ranch and split his time between fruit-growing and acting. He had groves of oranges, lemons and avocados, made deals with Sunkist, was a district director for avocado distributor Calavo, and helped found the Escondido Fish and Game Association--while not working for the Escondido Soil Conservation District.

His wife Leona passed away in 1952, the same year as Bevan's final film appearance as a town councilman in *Hans Christian Anderson* (1952). After retiring from the screen he eventually married again, this time to former Ziegfeld Follies girl Betsy Rees, and turned his focus to his ranch.

One November morning in 1957 Bevan called his doctor, saying he wasn't feeling well and might have a mild case of the Asian flu. That evening Betsy found him on the floor of their living room. When word spread of his death, some neighbors were surprised to hear that the esteemed community leader Bill Harris was also the screen comedian and character actor Billy Bevan--unaware that his occasional "business trips" to L.A. were to appear in films.

In the following decades Bevan's comedies were shown on T.V. as children's programming and turned up in documentary clips about the "good old days" of "pie-throwing



slapstick," keeping his face familiar to classic film lovers. Today a number of his silent comedies survive in much better condition than those fuzzy, 16mm prints that circulated in the '60s, allowing comedy fans to enjoy this likable soul's performances just as clearly as audiences did in the Roaring Twenties.

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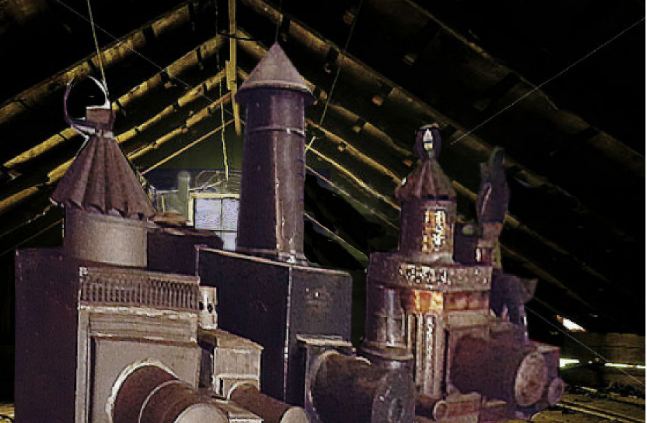
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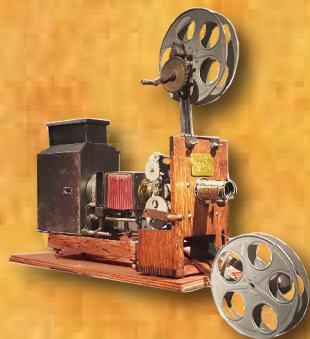
NEW ORLEANS ATTIC TREASURE! 100 YEAR-OLD DISCOVERY ON DISPLAY

A rare collection of precinema devices recently discovered in the small two room attica apartment of local New Orleans professor Robert Fleshman is now a permanent "DAWN of CINEMA" exhibit at the University of New Orleans, Nims Center for Entertainment Arts.

The collection grew quietly over 35 years and contains more than 200 rare optical devices; restored and working models of Lumiere Brothers and Thomas Edison projectors; wooden and metal Mutoscopes; Kinora viewers, optical peep shows; more than 1,000 vintage glass magic lantern slides; Praxinoscopes and many long forgotten experimental devices from the 1890's



THE DAWN OF CINEMA COLLECTION offers
Personal and Group Tours
Access for Historians and Researchers
Volunteer Opportunities
Internships for University Students
Masters of Silent Cinema Series Screenings



The Dawn of Cinema Collection

To learn more about visits, research opportunities and support for
the DAWN OF CINEMA COLLECTION

Direct inquiries and comments to: info@nimscenter.com

Roger Benischek, Curator / Executive Director



HAROLD LLOYD'S UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

A ROY BROOKS SCRAP BOOK

BY ANNETTE D'AGOSTINO LLOYD

Note to self: it is indeed a challenge to be asked to write an article on someone who you've written four books about.
Further note to self: I love a challenge.

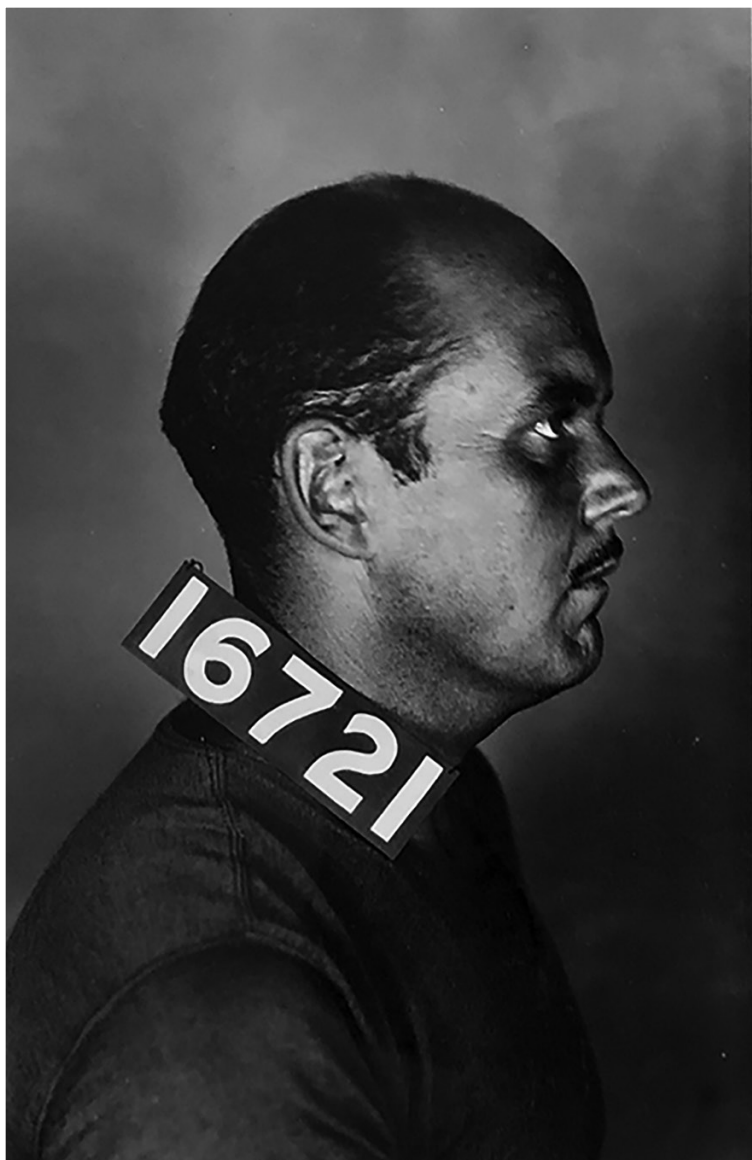


When I wrote my first book on Harold Lloyd, during calendar year 1993, I was one of a very few on Long Island who knew who he was: this was painfully obvious to me when, upon proudly sharing plans for my very first book, folks would ask "Who?" at the name of the subject.

In those pre-VCR, pre-Internet, pre-streaming days, it was close to impossible to see a Lloyd film. It was hard to get a book on him. It was a challenge - a happy and do-able one albeit - to write on someone who was so unknown, and yet who, in his day, was a giant legend. I had to go to libraries, archives, collectors' homes, and take tons of notes (with real paper, and pencils!). I made trips - on my own dime - to Washington, to Los Angeles, to Nebraska and to NYC to do original research. Google wasn't a blip on the radar then (the web browser or the verb!). Happily, things have changed in the close to 30 years that have passed.

Yes, things have changed mightily. Harold Lloyd is far from the undiscovered country that he was when I took on the grand honor of reintroducing his life and work to a new generation. He is now out there - he is available - and he is in the midst of a continuing renaissance. And yet, it perplexed me how challenged I felt when determining what to write about in this grand new journal. I felt it important to offer you something I hadn't presented in any of my books or my website - www.haroldlloyd.us (the world's first website devoted to HL, now in its 25th year!). I stared at the stuff I had in my office and, within minutes, I had my mystery solved. Some challenges don't take too long to figure out.





Years ago, a retiring vendor at the late, great, glorious Syracuse Cinefest gave me three scrap-books which belonged to a fellow named Roy Brooks. Born Roy Charles Muhlenbrucht, he was a childhood friend of actress Mildred Davis in Tacoma, Washington. They were so close that, when Mildred was selected to replace Bebe Daniels as Harold Lloyd's cinematic female lead in 1919, Mid (as she was known off-screen) invited Roy to come with her. He changed his full name to Roy Milnor Brooks at or around this time. He was a towering figure, 6' 4" with a solid build and an infectious smile. Soon, he was supporting Lloyd and Davis in the two-reel comedies (he was in eight Lloyd films; he was a riot in *High and Dizzy* from 1920 as Harold's home-brew buddy.

Later appeared in the Lloyd features *Grandma's Boy* and *Safety Last!*). His acting days ended in 1923, and Roy subsequently took on the role of Harold's social secretary - he was an omnipresent figure at the Lloyd home and at the bevy of parties, trips and social events that the Lloyds hosted and frequented - so this new position fit him to a tee. Roy, an open homosexual, lived at the famed Garden of Allah apartment complex on Sunset Boulevard and, towards the end of Harold's life, moved into the fabulous Lloyd estate, Greenacres. Roy was a lively and joyous presence in the lives of Harold and Mid ... he was a member of the family. Roy Brooks died on June 30, 1976, at age 76.



Roy maintained his scrapbooks chiefly as a way to preserve the happenings in his life. However, by extension, most of the books are veritable goldmines of visual and text information on Harold's life and career from 1920 on - at least in two of the books. One of them is exclusively a collection of comic strips and cartoons that Roy found funny. The other two, on the other hand, contain memorabilia, clippings, hand-drawings, stills, telegrams, notes, and full articles. Lots of gold in these books ... I thought I would take this opportunity to share with you some of the Roy Brooks Scrapbook curiosities that I haven't fully shared to date. You may learn something new! Enjoy.

HAROLD'S PET NAMES.

Harold Lloyd would need a private secretary to keep track of the nicknames he has given to comedians and others on the Roach lot. He has at least a dozen for Harry ("Snub") Pollard, but his favorite is "Post Card Eggie," usually abbreviated to "Eggie." His director, Fred Newmeyer, is "Bugs;" Sam Taylor, his scenario writer, is "Two Foot," since Taylor is always requesting on sets "two-foot flashes;" "Beanie" Walter is "King;" his brother, Gaylord, is "The Kid;" Mark Jones, "Mark Time" and "Mark the Blackboard;" Noah Young, "Noak's Ark;" Sammy Brooks, "Toodles;" Marie Mosquini, "Wop;" Mildred Davis, "Mitty," while Roy Brooks, to his great disgust, is "Pudge." Harold himself has not escaped, for Hal Roach one day named him "Speedy," and "Speedy" he has always remained.

My Favorite Clipping: This hidden gem from the June 11, 1921 edition of the Los Angeles Times shares Harold's nicknames for some of the staples on the Roach lot. The moniker of "Pudge" stuck with Roy beyond his screen days. Don't be offended by his nickname for the lovely Marie Mosquini (who later wed Lee DeForest and, by marriage, became the "Mother of Radio"). However, do note that Hal Roach did not give Harold his lifelong nickname of "Speedy" - that honor goes to Harold's father, James Darsie Lloyd, who pinned that name onto his youngest son when he was just a toddler.



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WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT

GEORGE W. E. ATKINS, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

Send the following message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to

To *Roy Brooks* *Feb 11* 1926

Street and No. (or Telephone Number)

Place

*% Harold Lloyd, 1040 Las Palmas
Hollywood California*

*Don't miss you at all but
Tom and I are singing all
your favorite songs about you
jealous question mark Love &
kisses*

Bebe, Phyllis, Tom

SENDER'S ADDRESS
FOR REFERENCE

SENDER'S TELE-
PHONE NUMBER

Telegrams! (Does anyone send Telegrams anymore?) This handwritten example, dated February 11, 1926, is addressed to Roy (care of Harold Lloyd Corporation offices at 1040 Las Palmas Avenue in Hollywood) from Bebe Daniels. Despite having left Harold's side in 1919, Bebe and Harold remained close - and anyone close with Harold was close with Roy.

This is adorableness personified, with Bebe mentioning her mother (Phyllis Griffin Daniels) and a fellow named Tom. Who exactly Tom is remains a mystery (save for the fact that we know he can sing) ... I think it's either Tom Waller, a prominent journalist of the day, Tom Moore, who was a co-star of Bebe's in 1924, or Thomas Meighan, also a Daniels co-star. Aren't you curious?

This telegram, dated April 3, 1926, is addressed to Roy at the Hotel Jovita, which was located at 726 S. Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles. Harold was writing from La Junta, Colorado, around 60 miles outside of Pueblo. Signed "Your Best Pal" ... possibly as Harold was hinting at his arrival home, and probably wanted Roy to pick him up.

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1926 APR 3 AM 1 04

VA30 52 NL

LAJUNTA COLO 2

ROY BROOKS **2191**

CARE JOVITA HOTEL LOSANGELES CALIF.

IT I WONT BE LONG NOW PAL AND OH BOY I AM GETTING A BIGGER KICK
 OUT OF COMING HOME THAN LEAVING HAVE HAD LOTS OF SNOW ALL THE
 WAY BUT THIS WAY ITS FUN WILL SEE YOU MONDAY WILL BE IN
 ALBUQUERQUE TEN THIRTY GALLUP THREE THIRTY TRAIN THREE YOUR BEST
 PAL

HAROLD.



PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

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This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.		
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Received at 610 So. Spring St., Los Angeles, Cal. ALWAYS OPEN

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ROY BROOKS=

HOLLYWOOD ATHLETIC CLUB HOLLYWOOD CALIF=

PUDGE IF YOU HAD BEEN DOING THE SAME THINGS I HAVE YOU
 WOULD HAVE GOTTEN A GREAT KICK BUT I THINK I WILL HAVE
 TO GO TO EUROPE FOR MINE THIS IS LIKE READING A BOOK OVER
 SEVERAL TIMES HAD A NICE DINNER AT THE TAVERN YESTERDAY
 FIRST TIME LOOKED JUST THE SAME SHOWS JUST FAIR STILL
 HAVING PLENTY BUSINESS NOT MUCH REST THINK I WILL CONSIDER
 YOUR LETTERS PART OF YOUR DUTIES GET BUSY YOUR THE BEST
 EASILY I MISS YOU WHAT ABOUT IT=

HAROLD.

Four years later saw Roy hanging his hat at the Hollywood Athletic Club, a booming presence at 6525 Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood since 1924. Harold was in New York City, coincident with the release of his second sound picture, Feet First, which would be released on November 8, 1930. It was - even at this juncture in his career - a habit of Harold's to check on the previews and early releases of his pictures, and this trip took him to New York City, where he dined at The Tavern (not sure if it was Fraunces or the one On the Green). The ending of this telegram epitomized the enduring friendship between Lloyd and Brooks: wrote Harold to Roy, "Your [sic] the best easily ... I miss you ... what about it."

One of the benefits of not only being one of the most famous and successful men in Hollywood, but also owning one of the largest and grandest estates in Beverly Hills, is that you can host killer parties. There are legendary stories of the parties at Greenacres - one time, party goers were found roaming the grounds of the 16-acre estate days after the party ended. Harold hosted an All Hallows Eve party seemingly yearly. This is one very interesting still from the 1947 Halloween party. Seated, from left to right: Harold, Edwina Westmore, Mid, and Wally Westmore, famed makeup artist. Among those standing: second from left, Peggy Lloyd; second from right in striped shirt and pirate hat, Roy Brooks, and at right, Gloria Lloyd.



INSTRUCTIONS for the Use of Telephones

Dial all stations in accordance with this directory.

To call a Los Angeles number, dial "9", listen for the second dial tone and then dial the number as given in the Los Angeles directory.

Do not "flash" on the above classes of calls as this operation will break down your connection.

To call the switchboard attendant dial "21".

To report a station out of order dial "21".

To secure the telephone company's information service dial "9-113".

Name	Station No.
Barbecue	27
Breakfast Room	41
Boudoir	55
Garage, Apt. No. 1	32
Garage, Apt. No. 2	33
Gate Lodge	61
Gloria's Playhouse	25
Guest Room No. 1	23
Hall near Guest Rooms 2 and 3	24
Hall Number 4 (Near Gloria's Bedroom)	26
Handball Court	36
Sewing Room	51
Library	54
Living Room	56
Master's Bedroom and Loggia	44
Master's Dressing Room	43
Men's Room in Garage No. 1	31
Men's Room Vestibule	57
Mezzanine Closet	53
Pantry	42
Pavilion	35
Projection Room	47
Receiving Room	46
Servant's Hall	21
Switchboard	21
Swimming Pool	36
Tennis Court	34

HAROLD LLOYD TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Not many of us can boast of needing a suede-bound directory for all the phones in the home, but Harold did. This is not the first mention I've made of it - those who have been with me for a while will recall that I spotlighted it in the October 1997 issue of my beloved fanzine, The Lloyd Herald (published from 1995-1999). But while in '97 I wrote about it, now I show it to you. The directory - a copy of which I have - is bound in forest green suede with parchment paper inside. You'll notice that Gloria's Playhouse has a phone - this miniature thatched roof cottage was the first structure built on the estate, to give Glo somewhere to play while Mom & Dad were busy overseeing the building of the rest of the property.

Now comes a break in the photo action, for a portion of the script of the "Harold Lloyd Birthday Program," aired on KMPC radio (then at 5939 Sunset Boulevard) on April 20, 1949. This program took up the time slot of 8:12-8:30pm on Harold's 56th birthday. It will be recalled that HL was one of the Board of Directors of "The Radio Station of the Stars" (along with Bing Crosby, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll). I thought this section of the birthday show was particularly important to share:

ANNCR: Tonight KMPC offers a birthday salute to a great comedian and one of the nation's finest citizens: HAROLD LLOYD!

ANNCR: Every year, thousands of hopeful young men and women from all parts of the nation storm the motion picture studios, lured by dreams of fortune and success. With their own numbers stacking the odds against them, they keep coming undeterred by lack of funds or by the bitter advice of those who have vainly tried to crash the gates ahead of them, many a disheartened would-be actor has found himself wishing he had been born a generation sooner, when the movies were young and "anybody could get a job."

All right — let's go back to those halcyon days, when it was supposed to be so easy to get in the movies. Back into the era of the Silents, even before Rudolph Valentino, Vilma Banky and John Gilbert rose to fame. A young man with an urge to act stands on the sidewalk near a famous movie studio.

VOICE: Well, why doesn't he go in and ask for a job?

ANNCR: He has tried that — and he couldn't get past the gate.

VOICE: There's something wrong here. Why, this fellow is back in the good old days. He doesn't have to compete with Hope or Skelton or Jimmy Stewart.

ANNCR: Still he stands there, and sees scores of would-be actors and actresses turned away.

VOICE: Well, then, why doesn't he give up and go back to — uh — where's he from?

ANNCR: Burchard, Nebraska. But he doesn't intend to give up! As he watches, his mind is working. A disgruntled bystander nods towards the gate as a costumed extra swaggers importantly past the guard.

VOICE: See that ham, made up like a French duke or something? I can act rings around that guy — but he gets all the breaks! Look at him, marching in there like he owned the studio!

ANNCR: The young man makes no comment, but slips away. He returns in a few minutes with a jar of grease paint. Stepping out of sight behind a telephone pole, he smears his face with make-up. Then, joining a group of extras returning from lunch, he saunters toward the gate. The guard looks critically at the motley procession, notes that all are wearing costumes or grease paint, and lets them through. The guard doesn't know it, but he has just played an important part in launching the movie career of an energetic young man destined to become the most famous American comedian, and one of the most prominent and respected members of the motion picture industry. The ingenuity and decisive action that had won Harold Lloyd entrance to a studio proved a factor that soon won him the hearts of movie fans the world over.



Harold Lloyd's popularity with his fellow Americans has stimulated involved explanations by columnists, psychologists and critics. We identify ourselves, they say, with the appealing character Lloyd portrays on the screen. We laugh at the predicaments and troubles that beset this ordinary but likeable young man; and laugh even louder with exultation at the eventual triumph of the underdog over immense odds. The fact that Lloyd was born in almost the exact geographical center of the United States may or may not explain his sympathetic understanding of most Americans in all parts of the country. There is something of Harold Lloyd in all of us — and probably something of all of us in Harold Lloyd. At least we see in Lloyd's characterization the finer human qualities we like to think we have. There's a timidity that, under pressure, is transformed into courage. There's a sympathy, kindness and generosity. And a bold boisterous imagination in which the common man emerges the victor over evil, greed and viciousness.

Great lessons all ... a few paragraphs that speak volumes. I'm sure Harold was thrilled by this program.



Dearest-

Well, here we are and it is really too beautiful. You would love the hotel. The golf links are within a few feet from here and supposed to be very fine.

We have two nice rooms and huge porch, which the kids love.

2.

Went to zoo and Will Rogers Shrine this morning. Garden of the Gods, this afternoon. I do wish you were with us as we all miss you so much.

Everyone has been grand to us, couldn't be nicer.

Yesterday we were invited to a steak dinner, but we went to bed early so we could get a good

3

Start this morning.

Everyone knows Harry - he is quite the Belle - Blanch is swell, takes care of all our clothes etc.

Brother is a scream - quite the leader of the gang and in for everything.

Gloria + Peg have used all the writing paper and ruined the pens - I'm lucky to get one piece.

4.

We have had many laughs, such as getting off the train amid water jugs - milk bottles, flowers, fruit etc which I'll tell you when I see you.

We are all having a grand time but miss you.

Have all the fun you can only just don't forget me now and then -

All my love -
Mid.

There were times that Harold stayed home and the wife and kids went off for a holiday without him. Such a case in point was at one point in 1934 (Harold possibly couldn't leave because of production on *Professor Beware*) - Mildred took the three Lloyd children, Gloria, Peggy and Harold, Jr. off to Colorado Springs for a stay at The Broadmoor (still in operation at 1 Lake Avenue). With majestic water and mountain views, this is still considered a go-to luxury destination in Colorado. This charming four-page letter was handwritten by Mid - on page 3, note the mention of "Brother." That was the prime childhood nickname of Harold, Jr. (he was also known as "Duke" later in life).



Friday

Dear Eddie:

A note to thank you for your congratulations on my being voted an Oscar. But I have an idea it should be the other way around. I know you went to bat for me and that the stunning newcomer in our house is due partly to the efforts of one E. J. Mannix. I do appreciate it Eddie and thanks very very much.

I leave for New York next week but before I left, I wanted you to know what a fine feeling it is to know that one has staunch friends. As Jerry Lewis says, " I like it. "

As always,

Harold



A man of means and stature deserves a stationery logo of simple elegance – and this was Harold's. Roy's book contained two examples of the same design, one with raised gold lettering and clear background on 24lb. heavyweight ivory granite paper, and the other with raised gold lettering and royal blue background on very delicate parchment paper. Harold customarily used the granite paper (with the clear logo) to answer fan mail, such as this example from 1952. I believe that the blue logo and paper, being far more intricate and most likely pricier, was used for far rarer correspondence, like to presidents and kings. I love this logo – I made great use of it in my book, *Harold Lloyd: Magic in a Pair of Horn-Rimmed Glasses*, on each chapter heading.



This beautiful Kodachrome of the Greenacres Christmas tree (year unknown) was found in one of the scrapbooks, and its location, "L'Orangery," or the Sun Room, reminded me of a funny story that most of the Lloyd family, at one point or another, told me. It dealt with the hand-painted walls and ceiling of this room (the imagery of the room inspired the name of the room). It seems that the artist who was commissioned to do the room-wide mural, an Italian man named Mr. Durante, was quite proud and intensely focused on his painting of flowers, leaves, indigenous plants, branches and some parrots.

Too focused. He took years to finish this one room. The family moved into Greenacres in August 1929 - and Mr. Durante was still not finished. Harold grew understandably impatient, giving l'artista an ultimatum: finish in the next three weeks, or be fired without pay. This explains the difference in size between the leaves at the start of the job and the end of the job: they grew close to ten times their original size. Mr. Durante did get paid, by the way.

The final goodie comes in the form of a quote from an article in the Los Angeles Times dated Sunday, July 29, 1962 (ten days before the birth of yours truly!). The article dealt with the recent release of his first compilation film, Harold Lloyd's World of Comedy. He did a country ton of interviews at this juncture and in promotion of this film, and each one has its own uniqueness. This exchange, authored by Don Alpert, saw Harold asked a very interesting question - did he have a philosophy regarding his success in film. His answer was quite telling:

"I don't have a formula," answered HL. "I don't know if formulas work. I do have a viewpoint on life, however. A couple of bromides.

"I believe in meeting a man more than halfway. Another thing is live and let live. So many people are so damn willing to judge someone else. Another one is the plain old Golden Rule - do unto others as you would have them do unto you. These are credos I've followed all these years."

There's still a lot we can learn from Harold Lloyd.



Here, the trio of Brooks, Davis and Lloyd take a break from filming Now or Never (1921) to enjoy a box lunch catered by Tausig & Lapworth (1415 Vine Street). Sandwiches and fruit ... and Harold's right hand strategically placed inside the box. Charming.

Thanks to Roy Brooks' diligent and faithful collection of a wide array of goodies from his close to six decades with Mildred Davis and Harold Lloyd, we have more discoveries made, and more of Harold to enjoy. Theirs was a friendship that keeps on giving, even today.





It's a damned sight easier to join the Damfinos!



(Just click on this ad to find out how)

DOROTHY DEVORE

Luminary of the Two-Reelers

By Joanna E. Rapf

The description of Dorothy Devore as a “luminary of the two-reelers,” by Bob Moak in *Picture Play Magazine* (September 1929) highlights a unique aspect of her career as a comedienne during the silent era: she never seriously aspired to do either features or drama, although she did both from time to time. She told Maude Cheatham in *Motion Picture Magazine* (March 1921), “Of course I do not want to remain in comedies always,” but doing comedy has been good training for “the heavier work of emotional and dramatic acting” (54). “So many girls have stepped right into dramatic work and that is where you’ll see me some day,” but in fact, her career involved very few dramatic roles and today she is largely forgotten as a comic star of the silent era (112).

She was born Anna Inez Williams in Fort Worth, Texas, on June 22, 1899 (although there is a dispute over whether or not she was actually born in 1901). She grew up without a father, leaving only her mother to take care of her as well as four brothers and an older sister. When Dorothy (née Anna) was eleven, her mother moved the family to California for her health.

She remained close to her mother and cared for her until her death, although her mother did not initially support an entertainment career. But she came around as her daughter found success as a singer in a small-time vaudeville act at Levy’s café in Los Angeles in her early teens where she was spotted by the Orpheum vaudeville circuit and given the chance to appear as “The Miniature Pocket-Edition Sophie Tucker.” She was only 5’ 1,” but she had a powerful singing voice and it is said that the actual Sophie Tucker gave her permission to use her name in exchange for the exclusive rights to some songs Devore had composed. But before she ever appeared as the “miniature Sophie Tucker,” she got a call from Universal to star with the popular comedy team of Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran. Their shorts tended to be situational, with developed plots, rather than the Mack Sennett-type slapstick popular earlier in the decade. A brief notice in *The Moving Picture World*



Dorothy Devore

on October 5, 1918, reports, “Dorothy DeVore [sic], the pretty miss whom Eddie Lyons and Lee Moran always try to kid in their Star Comedies, has three brothers in the service, all of them aviators. Whenever Dorothy autographs a photo for a male admirer she writes: ‘I hope you get as many Germans as my brothers are going to get.’”

After only a few films with Lyons and Moran, she was hired by Al Christie in 1918 and rapidly became a major player in his small company. Her first star-

ring role seems to have been in *Know Thy Wife* (December 1918), and this is also one of the few films of hers that is easily available today. Christie liked to use cross-dressing in his films, and hint at “kinky” situations, so in this one Devore (Betty) pretends she is her husband’s college roommate, Steve, when they go to meet his parents. The complication is that the parents have picked out another bride for their son, Bob. When Bob’s mother unexpectedly walks in on Betty and Bob who, thinking they are alone, are em-

bracing, the cute title card gives the mother's dialogue: "You boys seem awfully fond of each other." Another typical Christie gag occurs towards the end of the film when the mother now knows Betty is her daughter-in-law but is playing along with the ruse. This time it is the father who walks in on Betty (still dressed as Steve) embracing his wife in bed. His shock is tempered when Bob ironically explains, "This young fellow is my wife."

Obviously, a lot of the humor in *Know Why Wife* simply comes from the situation and the title cards rather than from any antics by Devore herself. Christie specialized in comedies that depended on plot rather than distinctive comic personalities,

so rather than developing a unique persona such as Flora Finch, Alice Howell, or Louise Fazenda, Devore played a variety of characters and this in part may account for why she is not well remembered today. *Picture-Play Magazine* (1923) noted, "In the last few months Dorothy has burlesqued all sorts of people and experiences," and these included a parody of Lillian Gish in *Way Down East* in the Christie comedy, *Winter Has Come* (1923), a horsey Dorothy in *Let 'Er Run* (1923), a satire of old race-track melodramas for which Devore prepared for her role as a female jockey by taking riding lessons all summer, or a little kid with a bow in her hair in *Babies Welcome* (1923).



Hold Your Breath

A page from *Picture-Play Magazine* (March-August 1923) notes that "Dorothy Devore has played just about everything in Christie Comedies but old King Tut."

Devore was chosen as one of the WAMPAS Baby Stars in 1923, and she appeared in at least seven shorts that year, including those mentioned above. In 1924, Charles Christie, Al's brother who handled the business end of the studio, announced that Dorothy Devore has "been elevated to stardom," and will be featured in a series of comedies known as "Al Christie Special Features." The first of these feature-length films was *Hold Your Breath* (1924) in which she plays a reporter, filling in for her ailing brother, trying to get an interview with a reclusive millionaire, played by Tully Marshall about a valuable bracelet he has acquired. When she succeeds, an organ grinder's monkey reaches through a window and makes off with the bracelet. The rest of the film shows Devore, like a human fly, trying to retrieve the precious piece of jewelry that of course

COMING!
AN
**AL CHRISTIE
FEATURE**

DOROTHY DEVORE

with a great comedy cast

Dorothy Devore

Walter Hiers
Tully Marshall

Jimmie Adams
Priscilla Bonner
and
Jimmie Harrison

Directed by
Scott Sidney

Story by
Frank Roland Conklin

Distributed by
HODKINSON
Foreign Distributor
Wm VOGEL Distributing Corp
Season 1924-1925
Thirty First-Run Pictures

WALTER HIERS



is recovered at the end. But the highlight is Devore's chase after the monkey over façade of the millionaire's apartment building while she herself is being pursued by two cops. Reviews inevitably compared it to Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last* (1923) that appeared the year before and the debt is obvious. A brief note in *Motion Picture Magazine* (Vol. 28, August 1924) suggests that she "out-harolds Harold Lloyd so far as thrills are concerned." A review in *The Film Daily* (Sunday, September 7, 1924) reads: "We knew Dorothy Devore was a clever little comedienne, but little did anyone suspect her athletic leanings until in this, her first starring feature picture in which she proves a female Harold Lloyd as far as 'human fly' characteristics are concerned" (12). Trade magazines show pictures of her hanging off a building like Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last*, and during her ordeal there are a number of gags we also see in Lloyd's film.

Anthony Slide has suggested *Hold Your Breath* might well be called "a feminist response to Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last*, although sadly without the comedic genius of the latter," but he never explains why Lloyd was more of a genius than Devore (105).

Besides being described as "pert" and "pretty," she had always been an active and agile comic along with being a shrewd, intelligent businesswoman who knew her value to the Company. As Christie's top star, she was earning \$1,500 a week, but she thought she was worth more. Christie, in fact, had been loaning her out for more \$1,500 to other producers such as Leon Price of The Mission Film Corporation for *The Tomboy* in 1924, a small independent company



whose films were distributed by the newly formed Chadwick Pictures Corporation (Roberts). Under this arrangement, he paid Devore only her base salary, and kept the rest. She knew this, and as a popular star, she was also getting other offers. She asked Christie to pay her \$2500 to complete *Hold Your Breath*. This was more than both he and his brother were making, and the tensions over money strained a relationship that had apparently been both sexual and professional. But Devore remained grateful to Christie for "discovering" her and making her a star, writing in 1924, "I am most grateful to Al Christie for what he and his splendid staff of directors have taught me" (Hughes, 421).

After the break with Christie, she married Hawaiian theater owner Albert Wylie Mather in 1924, and for a brief time, signed with Warner Brothers in 1925

where she worked in features and dramas as well as comedies, including *Broadway Butterfly* (1925) with comedienne Louise Fazenda.

She and Jack Warner did not get along and she felt she was



With her mother.



overworked and underpaid. In 1925 alone, the Studio starred her in or loaned her out for a total of nine features, and even had her cancel her honeymoon to Mather to replace another actress. Although she was getting star billing and earning the good money, she was not happy with her scripts. In an interview as early as 1925 she spoke of being unhappy with her films at Warners, “seriously playing just the sort of ingénue roles that I used to burlesque. . . I truly dislike the type of girl I am forced to play so constantly and to have to idealize her!” (Doris Denbo, *Picture-Play Magazine*, August 1925). In an interview a year later she described these characters as “ingénues and neglected wives,” whereas she wanted to be “a comedy character somewhere between a Mabel Normand ragamuffin and a lady Harold Lloyd. Sort of a wistful, funny little girl in perilous situations” (*Picture-Play Magazine* (Vol. 25, Sept. 1926). With a clear idea of her own strengths as a comedian, she bought herself out of her seven-year contract with Warner Brothers when she was asked to play second fiddle in *Night Cry* (1926) to the Studio’s biggest star, Rin-Tin-Tin and went back to doing what she did so well: the domestic comic short.

In the spring of 1927, she signed a contract with Earle Hammons of Educational Pictures (now a former Christie distributor) to produce a series of shorts called “Dorothy Devore Comedies.” She was to have almost total control over production, including

August 6, 1927

733

Christie Comedies

Second Series A New Series



DOROTHY DEVORE IN

ALL-STAR CAST

“NOTHING LIKE IT”

ALL-STAR is the way to describe the cast in “NOTHING LIKE IT,” the first of the new series of CHRISTIE COMEDIES.

Headed by Dorothy Devore, the cast includes Eddie Barry, Earl Rodney, Helen Darling, Eugene Corey, Ward Caulfield, Fred Mack and Gus Leonard.

As much money was spent on “NOTHING LIKE IT” as is usually spent on five-reel features.

The costumes are a new departure in film comedy. Not the usual “funny” clothes you generally see—old worn-out clothes, worn in some comical manner—

BUT garments and jewels that might well turn Cleopatra herself green with envy.

AND—when the borrowed fire-horses run away—off the stage and pell-mell down the street with the hero—your audience will shriek!

Contract for New Series of 24 Today!



EDUCATIONAL FILM EXCHANGES, Inc., E. W. HAMMONS, President

cast and director, a three-month shooting schedule, and an impressive salary. Her first short was an airplane comedy *Up in Arms*, described in *Motion Picture News* (July/Sept. 1927) as a “two-reeler laid in and around an aviation field with the star in a thrill sequence aboard one of the planes at Clover Field, Los Angeles.” The Educational Pressbook for the



Cutie

film says, “Thrilling parachute leaps from speeding airplanes will be the features of the Educational Dorothy Devore Comedy.” We are told she learned to fly during the filming, and “is seriously thinking of buying an airplane.” Capitalizing on her reputation for daredevil students, in *Cutie* (1928) she “rides a rushing automobile right through the wall of a police station” and brings it to a crashing halt in front of the sergeant’s desk (Educational Pressbook).

The Educational shorts were enormously popular. The pressbook for *Cutie* says, “she is the only comedienne of note starring in two-reel comedies” and her success “is conclusive evidence of the wisdom of her decision to return to them, for she is alone in



her class in these fast laughmakers." She is quoted: "I did not like dramatic features. . . I do like the shorter comedies and immensely enjoy working in them. The work is harder, the hours are longer, but there is always the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing something that you enjoy more than anything else in the world." She seems to have become the undisputed queen of the genre, as described in a *Photoplay* piece in 1928 by James Quirk:

Dorothy Devore is the sole feminine funster left in two-reel-comedies.

Most cuties hold themselves above clowning and are lured from their bathing-suit hilarity to the solemnity of bigger and better things. But flippant Dorothy is wise to the fact that producing a laugh a day keeps freelancing away.

She much prefers going up on the payroll to going down in history....

Dorothy tried the drama. But after she had gone through the boring hoursstraight leads demand, she deserted features for films faster and funnier.

In 1928, she was the only woman making her own series of short comedies, but unfortunately many of them were poorly reviewed. *Auntie's Mistake*, released in March of 1929, received this comment in *Motion Picture News* (vol. 39, p. 989): "with this release Dorothy Devore lags behind as a funster," and, "It is too bad to see Miss Devore trying to carry the burden of a gagless yarn." Her last film

in a featured role was in 1930, *Take the Heir*, with Edward Everett Horton, a silent with talking sequences. In that year, *Talking Screen* (1.1 [January 1930]) reported that, "Dorothy Devore has said good-bye to Hollywood. She is wealthy. So is her husband, Wiley Mather. They have built for themselves a palace in the heart of the redwood forests of California. There, they say, they will spend the balance of their lives."

But this did not happen. In an acrimonious divorce, Devore and her husband separated in 1933. When she died at the Motion Picture Home in Woodland Hills, California in 1976, her obituary in *Variety* (September 15) mentions that in "the late 1920s and early '30s she was known for her parties in Hollywood and she was one the first of the international flying set, making many trips to Hawaii and the Orient. She lived in Shanghai for two and one-half years."

An overview of her career suggests at least three reasons for why she is largely forgotten today, besides the fact that so many of her films are unavailable. For one, as mentioned above, is that she played a great variety of characters and never developed a distinct persona such as Chaplin, Keaton, or Lloyd, to mention three men, or Alice Howell, Louise Fazenda, or Gale Henry, to mention three women. Shorts have to tell their stories quickly and sim-

ply, in fewer scenes than features. The result, as Devore once wrote, is that "There is little room for the development of a character or the fine working out of a situation (Hughes, 421).

A second reason, at least according to Devore, is that she believed that comedy was more difficult to do than drama, and even harder for a woman:

Comedy is the hardest thing of all to do on the screen... While women stars outnumber the men in dramatic pictures, the situation is reversed in the fast and funny films. screen comedy seems especially made for men.

I suppose it is because there are so few things that happen to a woman in real life which are funny. Funny things that happen to a man would be distinctly unfunny if they happened to



a woman. It is funny, for instance, to hit a man in the face with a pie (on screen, of course), while the same thing happening to a woman would be unfunny. Women, therefore, have a much smaller source of comedy material from which to draw.

— Educational Pressbook on *Rab! Rab! Rab!* (1928)

And finally, a third reason for Devore's neglect may be due to the fact that performers in shorts never got the notoriety of featured players. By the late '20s there was a real distinction between those making shorts and those making features; it was almost like a class system, and the performers in shorts were second-class. A fascinating story about this "class system" in *Picture Play Magazine* by Bob Moak entitled, "Hollywood Draws the Line" asks, "What length films?" is the question that divides Hollywood into two castes, the feature-length players and the two-reelers, and seldom is the social gap crossed."

He points out that a feature-length player such as Gloria Swanson would never have invited "Dorothy Devore, luminary of the two-reelers," to a reception at her house. Devore's explanation for this apparent shunning is that, "Those of us who work in the shorts lead a different sort of life than those in the longer pictures. We put in more hours in the studios, and our work is more strenuous while we are before the camera. When we finish at night, we're just too tired to dress and go out to the Montmartre, the Coconut Gove, or to the Mayfair to dance. The result is that we never really get to know those who work for the major companies."

And the result today is that looking back at film history, we never really get to know so many of the hard-working and exhausted players from the shorts, including the versatile, athletic, and talented Dorothy Devore. As James Quirk noted, she preferred "going up on the payroll to going down in history." Sadly, she has not gone down in history. Largely forgotten, she was an independent, outspoken, energetic woman, free-spirited, and unafraid to stand up for herself. She earned a reputation for being difficult, but also so talented that studios were eager to employ her. She indeed embodied something of the wistful beauty of a Mabel Normand and the spunk of a Harold Lloyd. She made her career her own, a pioneer for women in comedy who deserves



to be remembered as the "luminary of the two-reelers."

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THE
Three Stooges
JOURNAL

ISSUE #173

SPRING 2020



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KEATON CRACKS UP

The Great Stoneface?

(Part One)

By John Bengtson

Buster Keaton: “The Great Stoneface.” Much has been written about the deadpan star’s onscreen persona, the comic who never smiled on camera. He even acknowledged this with a self-aware joke during *Go West*. Audiences squealed expectantly when the poker-player Buster accuses of cheating demands Keaton at gunpoint to “Smile when you say that!” Will Buster finally give in? Of course not. Keaton topped the gag instead by mimicking Lillian Gish in *Broken Blossoms*, forced to smile on command by her abusive father.



Go West



Broken Blossoms

Despite his deadpan reputation, even as a kid I remember watching Buster smile readily during *Coney Island*, made under the direction of his friend and mentor Roscoe Arbuckle. I also remember Buster grimacing wildly as Luke the dog tears off his pants during *The Garage*, Buster’s final Arbuckle film. So, I became curious, just how deadpan actually was Buster during his Roscoe years?

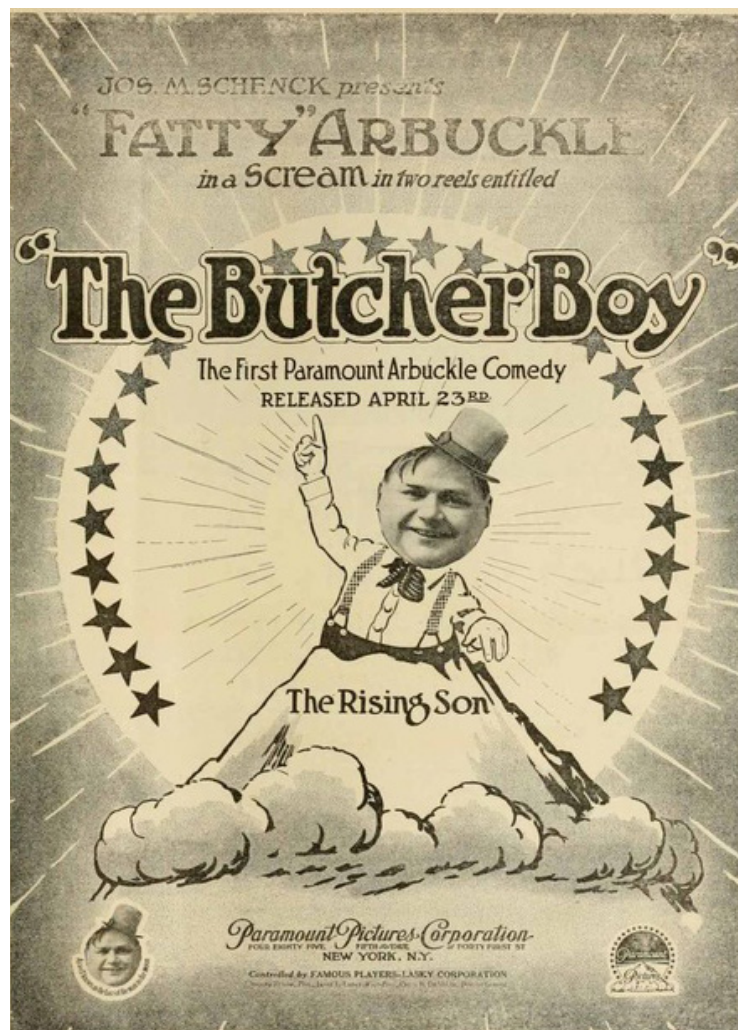
Was Buster acting compliantly with Arbuckle’s explicit directions? Was Buster instead rebelling against his father Joe’s strict onstage admonition “Face! Face! Freeze the puss!”?

Was Buster just getting it out of his system, intuitively knowing he’d resume the deadpan for his solo career? Who knows?

But yet again, the wonderful clarity of the Arbuckle-Keaton Blu-ray films, and the freeze-frame technology unavailable to 16mm film collectors a generation ago, allows these movies to speak for themselves, revealing even more fascinating details about Buster’s early career.

Note: given the remarkably large number of times Buster smiles, to avoid reader fatigue I will present this story in at least two parts.

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The Butcher Boy

Keaton fans are familiar with Buster's debut appearance on film. A chance meeting on the street, an intriguing invitation, and so Buster visits Arbuckle's studio to give it a try. But look at what the movie reveals.



To begin, Buster smiles at Roscoe during their very first encounter, when Buster “remembers” he left the coins to pay for his molasses in the bottom of the bucket. That didn’t take long – Buster knocked down his deadpan rule his first time at bat.



Moments later, while reentering the store, Buster smiles gesturing to another customer about forgetting his hat.

Once inside, Buster is famously knocked to the floor by a sack of flour, his debut pratfall. But then what does he do?



Buster retaliates by throwing a pie! Left-handed as well, so he won't block view of the action with his body as he flings the pastry stage left. This is the first of only two pies tossed during his entire silent film career (the second was in *The Garage* – more next issue), and it's literally his first day on camera, ever.

Since pie-throwing had become somewhat passé by 1917, blogger Lea Stans of *Silent-ology* fame wonders whether this might have even been a bit of an inside joke — Buster demanding with mock indignation, “What, give up my stage career for some two-bit flicker? I refuse unless you let me toss a pie!”

Struck by the pie, Arbuckle's co-star and nephew Al St. John returns fire with another bag of flour, missing Buster, and striking that other customer in the face. Buster's response is to double over laughing at the man's misfortune.



Reel two of *The Butcher Boy* takes place at a girl's boarding school, where Roscoe's sweetheart portrayed by Josephine Stevens is exiled. When Roscoe gains entry disguised as a girl, Buster assists Al to gain entry with a similar disguise. Here, Buster delights at Al's ridiculous costume.



Later, as intruders held at gunpoint by the school headmistress, Buster smiles to reassure her they aren't really a threat.

In all, a fan in 1917 familiar with Buster's stage work, eager to witness his first onscreen appearance, might very well have wondered "what happened to the old Buster?"



The Rough House

Buster plays both a bearded gardener and a delivery boy.



While barely a glimmer of a smile escapes Buster's lips as he assists Roscoe with the garden hose, his unique makeup alone deserves mention.



Next, delivery boy Buster flirts with Josephine Stevens, displaying a more subtle, close-mouthed grin.



Next, Buster returns to his more characteristic smile, laughing in derision at Al's calamity.



The cops break up Al and Buster's fight and drag them to jail. When offered positions on the police force in lieu of imprisonment, Buster and Al's mutual smile seal their accord.

His Wedding Night

Buster delivers a wedding dress to Roscoe's fiancé portrayed by Alice Mann.



Buster's reward for winking suggestively to Roscoe, thanks to a large speck of dust lodged in his eye, is a hearty glass of ale that puts Buster in a visibly happier mood.



Unaware Buster is modeling the wedding dress for Alice's approval, Al kidnaps Buster from the store in a forced elopement. Remarkably, this two story set, replete with a horse carriage and dirt road, was an interior set contained within the upper floor glass shooting stage of the Biograph Studio in the Bronx, some 30-40 feet above the street.



After being forcibly married to Al, while still incognito, and then recovering from a blow to the head, Buster, now unveiled, seems quite pleased with the idea.

Oh Doctor!

Buster portrays Roscoe's bratty son. While Buster receives parental abuse from Dad, Buster in turn ridicules Dad with showers of effusive laughter over his misfortune betting on losing horses. *Oh Doctor!* ranks as one of Buster's least stoneface-ish performances.



Tears.



More tears.



Laughter, the best revenge.



Laughing and crying at home.



Crying in the streets.

Coney Island

Buster plays a secondary role, who seemingly loses his girl played by Alice Mann, first to Al, and then to Roscoe, before reuniting with her for a happy ending.



The movie opens with Buster gleefully applauding a real-life Coney Island parade. The float depicts Luna Park's famous Shoot the Chutes water slide ride and landmark 200 foot tower of electric lights. Buster is posing in front of Henderson's, a famous restaurant whose marquee sign appears in the parade shot.



Non-deadpan Buster cries over losing his girl to Al, who can afford to buy her an entrance ticket. The chariot-style Luna Park ticket booth appears ten years later with Harold Lloyd and Ann Christy during *Speedy*, also filmed at the park.





Fast becoming his signature smile, Buster once again laughs derisively at another person's misfortune – this time at Roscoe for being struck by the “High Striker” ring the bell mallet. Roscoe soon returns the favor to Buster.



Alice, Roscoe, and Buster all fall in the water at the Shoot the Chutes ride. First to climb out, Roscoe strolls away with Alice, leaving Buster behind soaking in his tears.



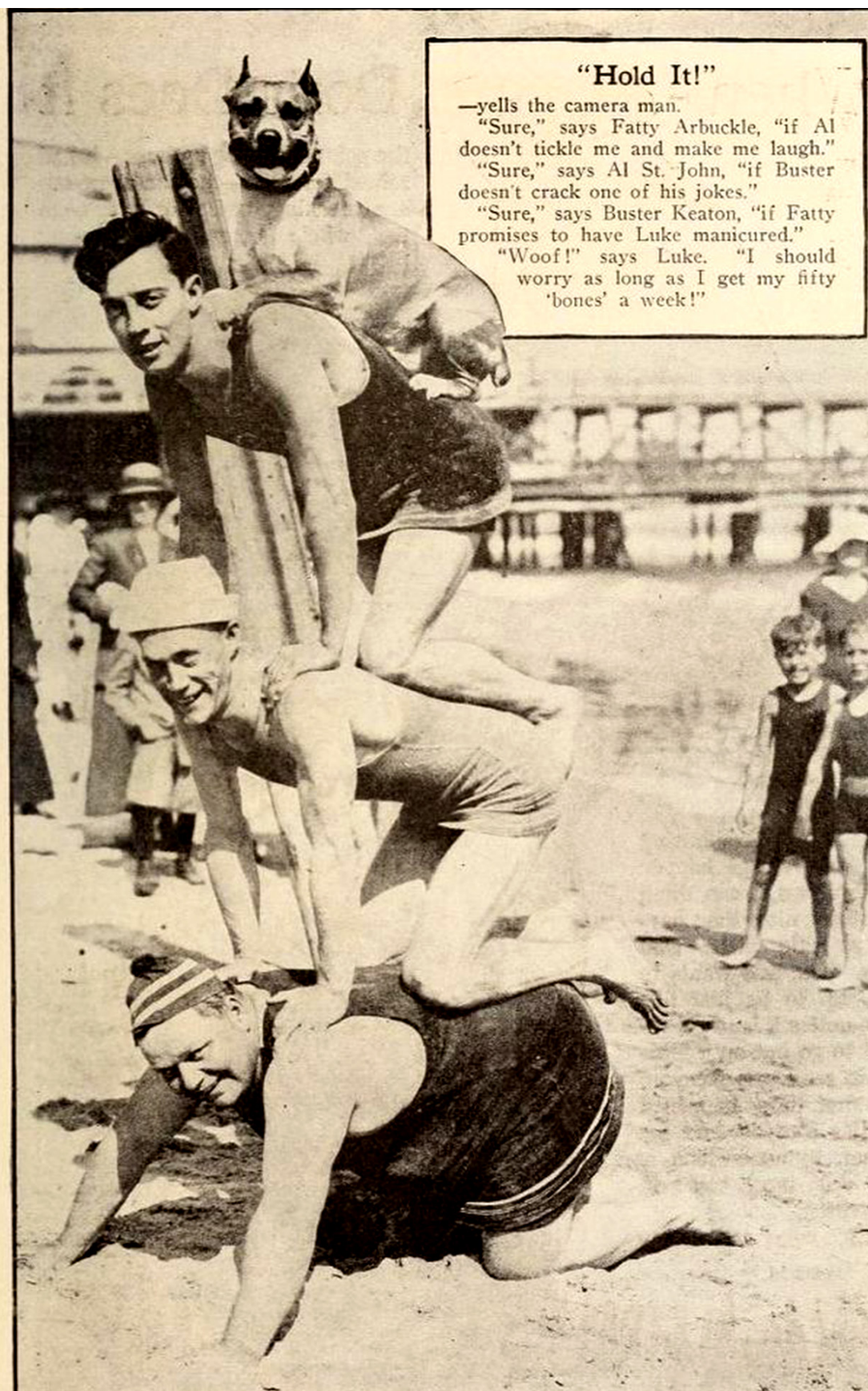
Roscoe decides to dress as a woman to hide from his wife so he can go bathing with Alice. Buster discovers Roscoe in the men's room, and laughs again in derision.



A picture for both the ladies and the gentlemen. No deadpan defying expressions here – just a remarkable image of Buster looking incredibly young and virile.



Buster and Alice continue laughing at Roscoe's fate before they run off to share a quiet moment together.



"Hold It!"

—yells the camera man.

"Sure," says Fatty Arbuckle, "if Al doesn't tickle me and make me laugh."

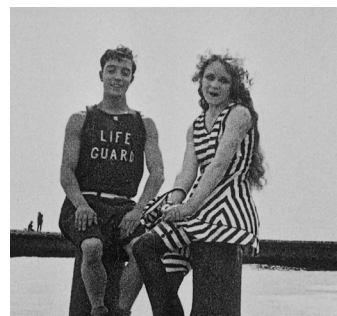
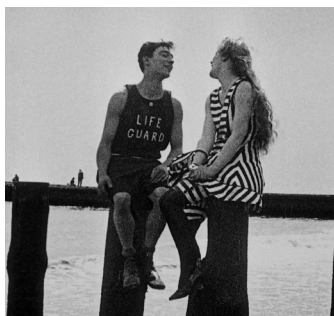
"Sure," says Al St. John, "if Buster doesn't crack one of his jokes."

"Sure," says Buster Keaton, "if Fatty promises to have Luke manicured."

"Woof!" says Luke. "I should worry as long as I get my fifty 'bones' a week!"



"He ain't a lady, she's a man!" Buster gleefully explains to Roscoe's wife that the "woman" nearby is Roscoe in drag, flirting with Al as a ruse to escape her detection.



Alone at last, Buster happily shares a kiss with Alice. In all, Buster's numerous smiles and tears during the production marks *Coney Island* as the pinnacle of his non-stoneface career.

Out West

Saloonkeeper Buster and bartender Roscoe discover seemingly invincible Al's Achilles heel – he can't withstand being tickled. While chomping a cigar through clenched teeth makes it less obvious, I'd say this scene still qualifies as a Buster smile.



Thus ends part one of Buster's deadpan departure. Believe it or not, many more Buster smiles await in part two.



WILLIAMS & WALKER



Bert Williams



George Walker



Ada Overton Walker

By Joyce Richardson

The vaudeville team of Williams & Walker reached its height of popularity in the early 1900s. George Walker (1874 – 1911) and Egbert Williams (1875 – 1922) met in San Francisco in 1893 and made their debut five years later in 1898 at the Casino Theatre in New York City.

Their premiere act was entitled “The Gold Bug” and consisted of songs and dances. The act was billed as “Two Real Coons” since vaudeville performers were primarily whites appearing in blackface. Walker was the darker-skinned of the pair and played the “dandy,” the more sophisticated of the two, while Williams, who was considerably fairer, “blackened up” for the stage while playing stereotypical Black characters. Bert Williams, as he was known on stage, was also a musician, having penned numerous songs. His signature song was “Nobody” (1905) from the Broadway production of “Abyssinia” (1906). Williams later



became a star of the Ziegfeld Follies, being the highest paid performer of that organization for a span of 10 years.

A musical comedy of significance produced and performed by The Williams & Walker Co. was entitled *In Dahomey*. This is considered to be the first full-length musical entirely written and performed by Blacks. It featured music by Will Marion Cook, Book by Jesse A Shipp, and lyrics by Paul Laurence Dunbar. The production ran for 53 performances including 2 tours of the United States and 1 tour of the United Kingdom, spanning a length of 4 years.

Ada (Aida) Overton Walker (1880 – 1914), wife of George Walker, was often regarded as “The Queen of the Cakewalk.” She was a choreographer, actress, dancer, and singer. She went on to perform after her husband’s death in 1911 at the age of 38 from complications from syphilis. She went on to win acclaim for her interpretation and choreography of Salome

performed at Hammerstein’s Paradise Roof Garden on Broadway. She suddenly died in 1914 at the age of 34 from kidney failure.

Bert Williams collapsed while performing on stage and died at his home in New York City at the age of 47.

Bert Williams singing “Nobody,” recorded January 7, 1913

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvDpz1E-Jb_M

Bert Williams, Famous Poker Routine from A Natural Born Gambler, Biograph Studios (1916)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcaJ9gN-wHK4>





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MUSINGS

In the Beginning

By Sam Gill

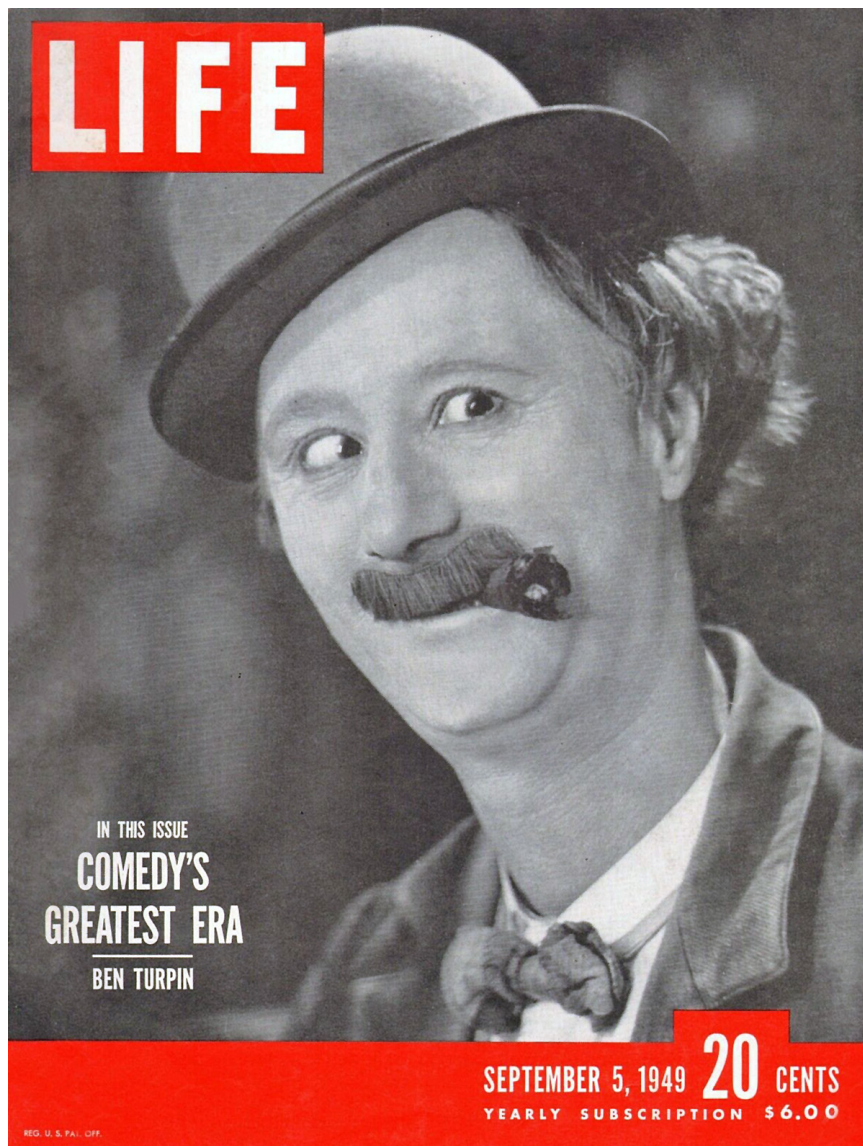
Paul Gierucki, in what may prove to have been quite a monumental lapse in good judgment, recently contacted me asking if I would like to contribute something to a new on-line magazine called COMIQUE. The subject, as I understood it, was to be pretty much any aspect of comedy in the fields of film, radio, television and perhaps other entertainment venues, during the period of pre-1965. Paul didn't mention Greek, Roman or Parthian eras, but I assume one could go back that far, or even farther, if one wanted to.

In answer to Paul's offer, I hemmed and hawed, stammered a few incoherent words, and then asked "Why the name *Comique*?" I think I already knew the answer, and Paul's response was pretty much as I expected—that it is not specifically named in honor of the truly unique films of the Comique film company that highlighted the never-surpassed comedy acrobatics of that trio Roscoe Arbuckle, Buster Keaton and Al St. John—but in the spirit of those films and the inspired lunatics who created and appeared in them.

Before I could rally any kind of reasoned thought processes, I said "Yes." In way of explanation to those who don't know me, my saying "Yes" is an ongoing failing of mine, and always has been dating back to my early childhood. So, anyone reading this admission of guilt, and finding what follows to be complete nonsense or inadequate at best can always skip to the next piece by the next contributor, and be done with me. If I were not writing this myself, that's probably what I would do. That may sound illogical, but at the same time, it's true.

Paul then suggested that I contribute whatever I might like to contribute, whether it be an essay, reprint of an article, pictures, ads from old trade magazines, excerpts from interviews of individuals I met and spoke with in the days of yore, or anything else that might pop into my head to add as my own spice to what promises to be an enticing and tasty stew. I must say that when Paul told me just who some of the contributors would be, I realized that the cooks, or perhaps I should say, chefs, behind this potpourri are as bright, knowledgeable and talented a group as anyone could find anywhere.

To my way of thinking, *Comique* may turn out to be not only informative, but also educational, and god forbid in these serious times, just fun to read and to look



at. Perhaps along the way it could even inspire a laugh or two, here and there. Or it could turn out to be what was said to me by an extremely serious yet agitated film scholar I dealt with once back in the 1980s while serving as Archivist at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He insisted that he wanted to use the papers of a major film director that we had in Special Collections, although he had no specific project or purpose in mind, which was about the only require-

ment we had for the use of Special Collections. Yet, he was convinced that consulting them would be, for him, "edifying."

So who knows, maybe what one will find here in *Comique* will be... EDIFYING.

OK, enough of my silliness. The real truth is that from my earliest memory, and we are talking about the late-1940s and early 1950s, I found myself fascinated by silent film, especially silent screen comedies. The "why" I have never been able to explain. It just was. As to



The Butcher Boy (1917) featuring Alfred St. John, Roscoe Conklin Arbuckle and Joseph Frank Keaton

some of the background of this sorrowful tale: I was born in 1946 in a small central Kansas town called Sterling, which today has 2,500 intrepid souls whereas when I was a kid, there were only 2,000 intrepid souls. In that part of the country, with all the people leaving their towns for opportunities in the cities, having more people today instead of less people than when we were born, is almost unheard of. The reason this miracle occurred in Sterling is that the people who stayed behind when I “escaped” at age 18, have done wonders in making this beautiful little town even more beautiful and more desirable than ever to live in.

It was in this long-ago but now-to-me enchanted world of youth, that from my earliest memory I was entranced, whether by pictures in books, comedies on early television, or films my father projected on our home movie screen, by the mere sight of these nimble comedic souls and many more: cross-eyed Ben Turpin; stone-faced Buster Keaton; childlike Harry Langdon; corpulent yet kind-looking John Bunny; spinsterish Flora Finch; eager go-getter Harold Lloyd; spectacular Larry Semon; down-yet-never-out Charlie Chaplin (who always seemed more a “king in rags” to me than a broken-down hobo); beautiful yet no-nonsense Mabel Normand; hopeless country bumpkin Mack Sennett; eternal hayseed Al St. John; boyish and rubber-ball-like Roscoe Arbuckle; and the ridiculously-manic and always-mugging Ford Sterling (whom some people hated and I always loved) who also was frequently chief of police for the completely ineffective and absurdly bumbling *Keystone Cops*. And last but furthest from least, and perhaps the most beloved “couple” and closest friends I had in my small universe at that time: Stan

Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

It was my deep affection for Laurel and Hardy that first planted a little seed in my fervid brain that as soon as I were old enough, I would somehow get myself to Hollywood and meet them. I wanted to seek them out to tell them how much I loved their films, and how fond I was of the two to-me sad yet endearing fellows they played. Their friendship could withstand the worst storms, even anger and total exasperation with one another, yet by the end of their misadventures, they would come out more loving and caring for each other than ever before. There was something miraculous in their relationship. Also, their voices were perfect for the characters they played—Ollie’s soft yet truly unique southern accent, and Stan’s quite proper yet in some way child-like British accent. And what an odd sight: two Americans wearing English derbies and overall looking much more English than American. They were such contrasting figures, but all the more fascinating and more loveable because of it.

When I was a little older, I started to delve into all the books and magazines I could find that would shed some light on just who were these men and women who were so different than most comics, especially the stand-up, lounge-lizard and snappy- come-back comics we saw on television, heard on radio or saw in the movies. It was difficult to find any in-depth information on these comedians and comediennes of the silent screen. In fact, they seemed so different from their modern counterparts that one could begin to wonder if they were not from Earth but had actually fallen to Earth from some Comical Planet ensconced in the Farthest Reaches of Outer Space. I’m kidding, of course, but gradually it dawned on me that the major difference, even with Laurel and Hardy in their sound films, or Charley Chase and Andy Clyde in *their* sound films, that the funniest or most amusing comedians and comediennes who came from the silent era were. They told their stories by their bodies, the expressions on their faces, and the gestures that they made. They didn’t need words; they had their bodies to speak for them.

As luck would have it, when I was a very young lad, loitering in my Grandmother's attic, poor Grandmother, I ran across her complete collection of *Life* magazine from the first issue in 1936 on, and came upon the issue of September 5, 1949. It sported a huge cover portrait of a cigar-smoking, cross-eyed Ben Turpin. What an arresting picture! He was looking right at me, and right past me, both at the same time! Best of all, it advertised right on the cover that inside this special issue there was an essay titled "Comedy's Greatest Era" by James Agee. Turning excitedly to that article, I fear my life took on a special trajectory from which it never recovered, and which has brought me up to this very day, this day where we celebrate the first appearance of our very own on-line *Comique*.

To my thinking, there never has been an essay superior to or even equal to the essay written by James Agee, this man whom one of my college English teachers called a writer of titanic proportions. Quote, unquote. As the author of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* with Walker Evans, *A Death In The Family*, his extraordinary poetry, and equally extraordinary film criticism, James Agee died tragically young at the age of 45. My discovery of his eye-and-brain-opening essay on silent screen comedy came very nearly at the same time of Agee's death. Like Laurel and Hardy, I wanted to meet James Agee to tell him how important his essay was to me, and because of that essay, how important he himself was to me.



Arthur S. Jefferson and O. Norvell Hardy

My sad tale doesn't quite end there. James Agee died in 1955 at 45, when I was nine. Then, Oliver Hardy died in 1957 at age 65, when I was eleven. Then, Stan Laurel died in 1965 at age 74, when I was nineteen. What made Stan Laurel's death especially difficult for me was that I had written Stan Laurel a letter years earlier, but the letter was returned to sender, and I couldn't seem to find a correct mailing address. However, in late 1964, my friend Mike Polacek was visiting Stan at his home in Santa Monica, and I asked Mike if he could ask Stan Laurel if I might be able to come visit him in the following Summer; that is, if I could get myself out to Hollywood in June of 1965.

To my delight, soon after asking this favor of Mike, I received a post card from Mike telling me he was visiting Stan right then, and down at the bottom of the card, in a clear and beautiful handwriting, were the words, "Hello Sam! Stan Laurel." I about fainted when I saw this. Words written in Stan's own hand and to me! Well, I decided then and there I would get myself out to Los Angeles that coming Summer, no matter what, by hook or crook, or hook *and* crook. Then, only a few short months later, I learned that on February 23, 1965 that Stan Laurel, Arthur Stanley Jefferson, had

passed away at the age of 74 of a heart attack. To say that my heart sank at the moment I heard that would be an understatement to say the least. I even scrubbed the idea of getting myself out to Hollywood that coming Summer. My heart wasn't in it. But over the Winter of 1965, while enrolled in my Sophomore year at the University of Kansas, I decided at long last that in June of 1966 nothing on Earth (including my parents) would stop me from packing a suitcase, jumping in my car and driving straight to Hollywood, California. And so I did.

And so ends Musings, No. 1 — "In the Beginning"

Next

Now to those who are interested, or those who are gluttons for punishment. Stay tuned, as I will continue this personal saga of mine, detailing lots of ridiculous things I got myself into while in Hollywood. That will include blow-by-blow accounts of some of the outrageous people I met and ran away from, or met and got to be friends with, as well as many unforgettable encounters with lots and lots of people who had worked in silent pictures. And whose stories I wrote down at the time, verbatim! As I look back on the Summer of 1966, I see myself not so much motoring into Los Angeles, as entering a kind of magical place, a place that was and is not just forty suburbs in search of a city, as some people joke, but a mythical place, in fact, a place that I will go so far as to call, with a tip of the hat to Tony Slide, "Hollywood: A Fabled Land."

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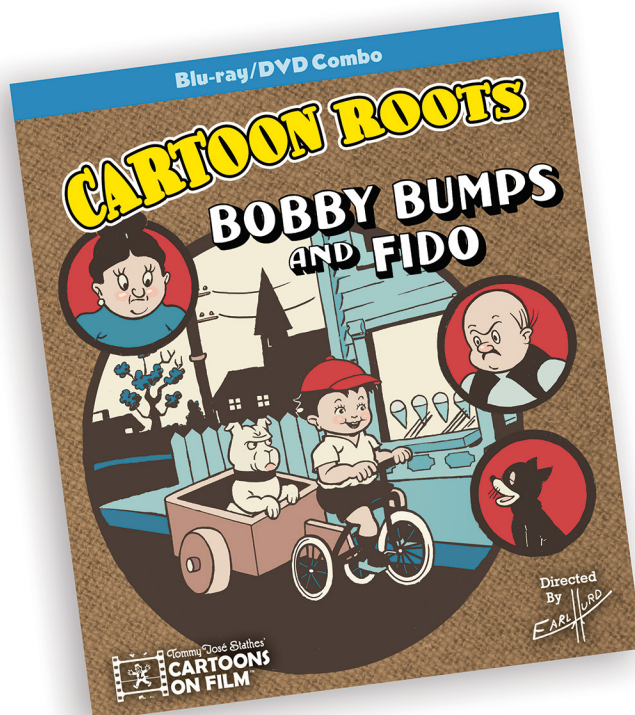
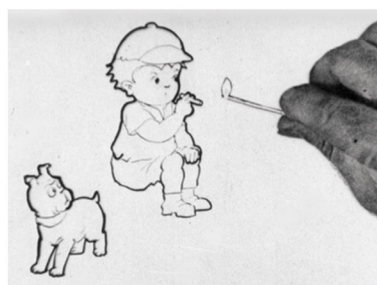


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FRANKLIN PANGBORN

The Early Years

By Mary Mallory

When 1930s Hollywood needed a seemingly organized and efficient bank or hotel manager who quickly became nervous and rattled, who better to turn to than the scene-stealing, ever lovable Franklin Pangborn? Busy and in demand from the beginning of his film career, he spent several years mostly starring in one and two-reel comedies for the likes of Mack Sennett, Educational, Pathe, and Mermaid, along with occasional feature roles, until settling in as Hollywood's favorite nervous nelly in the mid-1930s.

Our brilliant hero Pangborn was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. Per the January 12, 1931 *Film Daily*, he “studied architecture as a boy but his bent for the stage, which he evidently inherited from his grandmother, a well known actress, asserted itself before he graduated.” The March 14, 1926 *Los Angeles Times* called him “quiet-mannered, unassuming and self effacing,” and “a member of a distinguished New Jersey family and one of the thoroughbreds of the stage.”

In the March 4 edition, the *Times* stated that Pangborn took to acting at the age of 12, which didn't make his father too pleased. He told his son to take the first job he was offered. It so happened that a stock company in Newark needed an extra boy, and his father landed him the position, which merely re-



Franklin Pangborn

quired him to run across the stage and be caught and beaten by a policeman. He spoke with the actor playing the role and supposedly said, “When you run across the stage tonight and catch my son, drub him thoroughly.” Franklin came through like a pro, but his father yanked him from the production. He supposedly also played in a Newark production of “Hamlet.”

The article goes on to say that he gained his first real taste of the stage playing stock with Mildred Holland, and then productions of “Joseph and His Brethren” with Pauline Frederick and “War Brides” and “The Marionettes” with Alla Nazimova. Pangborn claimed this apprenticeship with the great Nazimova shaped his acting philosophy and technique. “Miss Nazimova, then at the

height of her career, taught me the value of thinking and listening on the stage. It has been of inestimable worth to me. I can safely say I never go on for a performance without realizing more and more that an actor, in order to make the character he portrays live - seem real - must have the natural reactions of thinking and listening." Pangborn worked two seasons with the actress, and later went on tour with the second company of "War Brides" as both manager and actor. He also toured in a Klaw and Erlanger revival of "Ben Hur," playing Messala.

Pangborn enlisted during World War I, serving in the 312th Infantry, where he was wounded and gassed at the Argonne, per the *Los Angeles Times*, which states that for a while after, "it was thought he had 'gone West.'" While he convalesced around Christmas 1918, he performed at the Topside Theater at Mars-Sur-Allier, helping build the theater and stage shows, but suffered a major relapse. Pangborn recuperated for almost two years until he could completely regain his voice and strength, and then came to Los Angeles in 1920 at the behest of Willamene Wilkes.

The actor threw himself into performing, quickly becoming one of the Majestic Theatre's top players, along with other actors like Edward Everett Horton, Holbrook Blinn, Leo Carrillo, and Marjorie Rambeau, playing everything from melodrama to farce. While working with the company, he met and quickly befriended the talented and beautiful Sara Sothern. The January 9, 1923 *Los Angeles Times* stated that the two had been engaged for months, but the actor told the paper he wasn't sure when they would be married. Their romance blossomed because of mutual tastes, careers, and being ardent Christian Scientists. At the time of the newspaper announcement, Pangborn remained in Los Angeles while Sothern performed in "The Fool" for the Selwyns in New York, soon to go to Chicago for a long run. Nothing came of this purported romance.

In late December, 1922, reports claimed that Pangborn would marry Miss Marjorie Cornell, the nurse who cared for him during World War I, "whom he met in San Francisco during a recent engagement." Pangborn "admitted a warm friendship for Miss Cornell, but nothing more." The performer popped up in the newspaper as the boyfriend or fiancée of a few women through 1928. The *Los Angeles Times* called him a boyfriend of "Stella" the film gossip columnist in 1928, and later that year, stated he was "supposedly engaged to Mrs. Jeanette Reid in December 1928." No woman seemed to entice him to settle down however.



In the mid-20s, Pangborn returned to the New York stage, where he played for twenty six weeks with Francine Larrimore in "The Parasites," before returning to the L.A. stage. "Pangy (as the *Times* called him)" jumped right back in to the theatre world, performing with composer/singer Jack Norworth in "Honeymoon House" in 1925, followed by the title role in "The Ideal Husband," a mentally deficient young man in "John Ferguson," and as Androcles in "Androcles and the Lion." He was considered the highlight of "Weak Sisters" as a boob reformer in 1926, which also featured Trixie Friganza. The newspaper stated, "He is an actor whose command of art is constantly growing and whose devotion to the spoken stage is deep, vigilant and sincere."

Film studio officials saw him in the play and signed him for *Exit Smiling* starring Beatrix Lillie, before he appeared opposite Louise Fazenda in "Finger Prints" and some shorts.

He soon signed with Metropolitan Studios. Pangborn rejoiced at performing in films. "I never knew what it was to really live until I entered motion pictures. On the stage I played every night and rehearsed during the day. When I left the theater there would always be a new role to study. Now when I leave the studio in the afternoon I have time for my friends, and the things I always wanted to do and never could find time for."

Pangborn's flare for comedy caught the attention of critics early on. *Film Daily's* October 30, 1927 review for *The Girl in the Pullman* remarked that "Franklin Pangborn scores in his individual style." A few months later, Pangborn signed with Cecil B. DeMille to star in *My Friend From India*, and signed a long term contract with the over the top director, before leaving to go freelance in May 1928.

The actor, along with Pauline Frederick, Bert Lytell, Lois Wil-

son, Holmes Herbert, and others appeared in the sound Vitaphone "special" *On Trial*, released in September 1928. Pangborn then returned to a production of "Weak Sisters" at the Vine Street Theater in February 1929, into which he invested some of his own money.

The *Los Angeles Times* noted that Pangborn "has made quite a name for himself in the 'silly sap' sort of a role..." and went on to state that he was a bachelor with the stage his first love. The paper also claimed, "He's in love. Of course, that's happened before, but this, heavens, is the real thing. No, she's not in the profession. He wouldn't divulge her name at this stage for the world. But presently — if *Weak Sisters* goes over big celebrations will be in order."

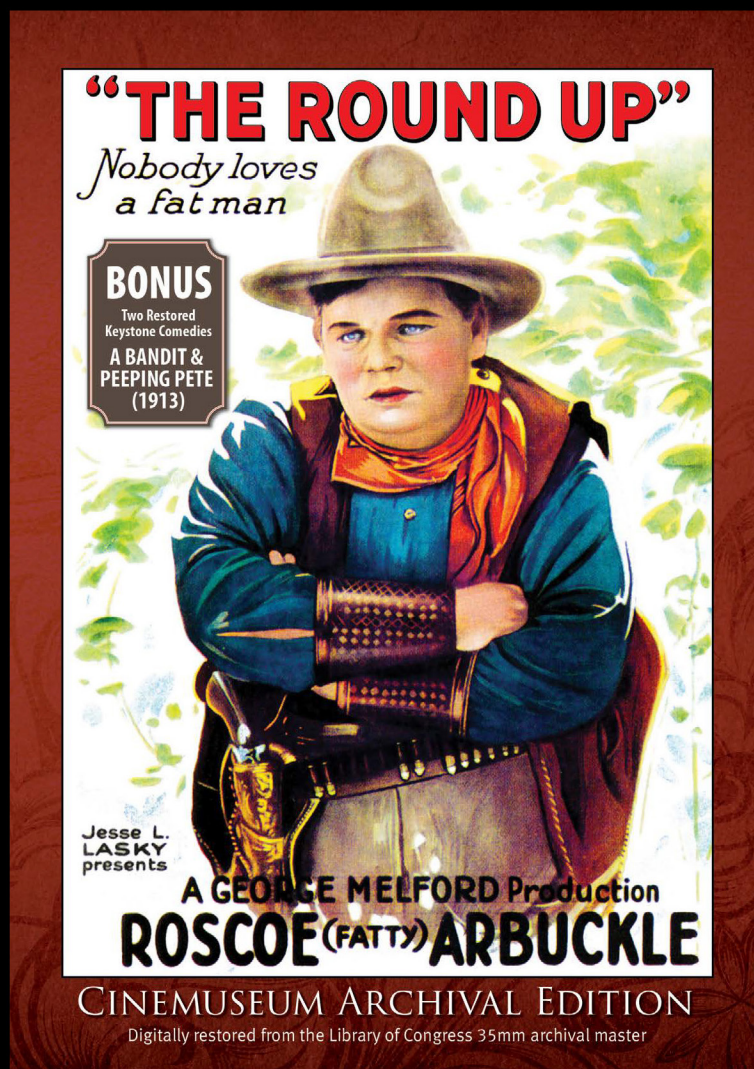
Pangborn performed in a wide variety of short comedy films over the next few years for companies like Sennett, Educational, Pathe, Universal, and Mermaid, with an occasional feature performance. The *Times* claimed that a comic sequence in *The Lady of the Pavements* was written exclusively for him. He quickly became a Hollywood comic favorite.

By 1936, the *Times* estimated his salary at \$700 a week, and Pangborn admitted to making 26 pictures in 48 weeks, "tripling" in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, *Mad About Music*, and *Doctor Rhythm*. Soon actors and filmmakers like W. C. Fields, Frank Capra, and Preston Sturges featured him prominently in their films, with Fields and Sturges writing parts expressly for the double take dynamo.

A quick study, Pangborn stole scenes and lines with simple flair. Moving from success on stage to fame in film, Pangborn's scene-stealing career as one of Hollywood's top second bananas took off in the mid-1930s, a story in itself. A later article will document his ever lasting appeal to cinema comedy fans everywhere.



The reviews are in:
Everybody
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ABBOTT AND COSTELLO

On Record

By Walt Mitchell & Paul E. Gierucki

A portion of the following article, originally titled *The Recording Career of Abbott and Costello*, was first published by Walt Mitchell in *The World of Yesterday* magazine No. 7, August 1976. It has been updated, revised, and expanded exclusively for *Comique Magazine*.
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“HEYYYYYYYYY AAAAAABBOTT!” “Whaddaya want, Costello?”

The sometimes plaintive but more often bellowing tenor voice of Lou Costello is instantly recognized, even today, by millions of people. The equally recognizable raspy baritone of Bud Abbott, responding to Costello's call, was always the signal for another zany routine from what was surely the fastest crosstalk act in show business history.

After finally achieving success on stage, they broke into radio via *The Kate Smith Hour* on CBS, reaching the highest peaks of stardom in both media. By the time they made the feature length film *Buck Privates* for Universal Studios in 1941, their place among the all-time giants of comedy was assured. The critics panned their films time after time. But the public loved the pair and proved it by turning out in droves, for more than a decade, each time one of their new movies arrived at local theatres across the country. Their television series, filmed in the early 1950s, was so successful that reruns continue to this very day. It is quite possi-

ble that *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners* are the only other comedy shows to equal the continuous popularity and viewer loyalty for over 60 years.



It is a rather curious fact, considering their immense popularity, that Bud and Lou made only a small number of commercially released recordings. The lack of a visual image was certainly no impediment; much of their humor was verbal. Moreover, their success in radio underscored the fact that they did not necessarily have to be seen to be enjoyed. Nevertheless, the fact remains.

Their debut on records was created under unusual circumstances indeed! While doing their best at Victor's Hollywood studios — recording a two-part song and comic dialogue combination called *Laugh, Laugh, Laugh* (Victor matrix PBS-061962, label number 27737) -- elsewhere on that same day, Victor was recording the broadcast voice of President Franklin Roosevelt asking Congress for a Declaration of War!

The date for both recordings was December 8th, 1941. Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese the day before.

ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

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RECORD HIT OF THE WEEK

ABBOTT
**AND**
**COSTELLO**

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LAUGH!"

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST ARTISTS ARE ON VICTOR

RECORDS

A Service of the Radio Corporation of America
In Canada: RCA Victor Company, Ltd., Montreal

The record starts with a brief rhyming patter bit from Bud and Lou, which is reminiscent of The Three Stooges' musical novelty short subject *Woman Haters* (1934) that consists entirely of rhyming dialogue over music. From there, the boys launch into a series of ancient wheezes which are punctuated with song from the Sportsmen Quartet. The premise is that old jokes can still be fun, and the first entry sets the tone for the entire platter:

BUD: Hey, Costello -- no smoking.

LOU: Hey, Abbott -- who's smokin'?

BUD: You are!

LOU: What makes you think I'm
smokin'?

BUD: Well, you've got a cigar in
your mouth...

LOU: I've got my shoes on but I
ain't walkin'!

The record culminates with everyone surrendering to contagious laughter, a comedy staple which is perhaps best represented in *The Okeh Laughing Record* (label number 4678-A) distributed on the Okeh label in 1922. The Laughing Record is one of the most unusual and enduring novelty recordings of all time, wherein two people eventually succumb to increasing bouts of laughter. Abbott and Costello revisited variations of this old vaudeville bit, often with hilarious results, throughout their career.

ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Laugh, Laugh, Laugh was not a response to Pearl Harbor; it was not intended as a “patriotic” type record. We are certain of this because, at that time, it would have been virtually impossible for the songs and jokes to have been written, arranged, scored, rehearsed, and recorded within 48 hours. Further, there is no mention of the bombing, nor any other similar reference, any place on the record. In fact, the only allusion is a mention of the Priority Board, which must have been in operation here previously due to the war in Europe. Therefore, it is assumed that the preliminary work on the record must have been handled some weeks in advance, and the December 8th recording date was likely set arbitrarily, with no one having any idea what was to happen in the interim.

It must have been awfully difficult, even with the support of the Sportsmen Quartet and Lou Bring’s orchestra, for Bud and Lou to go through with the date knowing that America was at war. Regardless, they carried it off perfectly and that 10-inch 78rpm record sold well despite the war — or perhaps because of it!

For reasons unknown, a note on the Victor blue history card, dated 1/20/1942, orders the use of the alternate title, *Hey! Abbott! — Hey! Costello!*, on future releases of *Laugh, Laugh, Laugh*.

The recording did in fact become available again in 1972, when RCA Victor combined the two parts of the disc on a single track for their Vintage series LP, *The Golden Age of Comedy* (LPV-580); going from original-issue Part One to original-issue Part Two without missing a beat of the music, although a few bars appear to have been eliminated for smoothness.



ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Their most sought-after disc, arguably, is the Enterprise Records release of Abbott & Costello performing *Who's on First?* (label number 501) circa April 1947. Bud and Lou created this excellent recording of their signature routine for the express purpose of generating funds for the Lou Costello Jr. Youth Foundation in Los Angeles, CA, setting a sales goal set at 1,200,000 copies. The pressing was another ten-inch 78rpm disc which was available at record stores and, reportedly, in major league ballparks around the country. The list price was \$1.05 each, and 100% of the proceeds were earmarked for the youth center.



There exist two known variants of this record: The standard release version, in which the WOF routine was preceded by *Take Me Out to The Ball Game* played on an electric organ, and a special demonstration pressing (identified by labels bearing the "501 Part A – Special" designation) which, once the sketch had begun, was identical to the commercial release. However, the lengthy organ introduction was replaced by an explanatory speech from Lou Costello himself. Preceded by a brief organ introduction, which fades after a few seconds, Lou is heard to say:

"Folks, this is Lou Costello. For ten years, Bud Abbott and I have been doing our baseball routine, *Who's on First* and *Who's on Third?* Well, today I wanna tell you for the first time who's on third: it's the underprivileged boy and girl. They have been left on third base, waiting for someone to sacrifice them home. Every one of you folks are at bat, and you mustn't strike out. These kids just got to be sacrificed home. There are a lot of ways of doing that. Bud and I think we have one of the answers: The Lou Costello Junior Youth Foundation, which we hope to bring to your city real soon. The proceeds from this record you are about to hear, go to this foundation. This is your time up at bat! Don't leave that kid stranded on third base! Buy one of these records and sacrifice him home! Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, from Bud Abbott and myself."

The disc is reported to have sold very well, but after just three months, the boys withdrew their distribution authorization claiming that "Enterprise owed them about \$8000 in back royalties," which according to a 1948 article in *Billboard*, were never paid. Enterprise Records folded within a year of the release.

In May of 1948, Abbott and Costello inked a new deal with Castle Records, of Hollywood CA, with the Harry Leader Distribution Company reportedly handling distribution, allowing them to assume distribution of *Who's on First?* (label number 1253). The Castle release of the record utilized the same master and sported a duo-tone blue label with a design approximating that of the Enterprise Records version.

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The hilarious
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by

ABBOTT and COSTELLO

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ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Castle also issued two additional A&C records circa 1950 / 1951, including *Abbott and Costello At the Races* (label number 1256), consisting of the *Mudder and Fodder Routine* (CA 502-1 MF) with *How to Bet the Horses* (CA 503-1 RT) on the flip side. Another disc contained *Abbott and Costello At the Drug Store* (label number 1262, CA-504-1-DS) backed with *Abbott and Costello Down on The Farm* (CA-505-1-DOF).

It should be noted that the comedy routines used for the Castle records were not recorded specifically for each release, rather they were culled from airchecks of old radio broadcasts. Per a July 1948 agreement with Nate Friedman, attorney for Abbott and Costello, Castle acquired "blanket disk rights" to approximately 150 of their recorded comedy routines -- but only released the three A&C records detailed herein.

A few years later, Castle's *Who's on First?* was combined with *Abbott and Costello At the Races* on a 45 rpm Extended Play record with no company listed. It is unknown if this was an authorized or a pirate issue.

Their final release was the Decca children's record *Jack and the Beanstalk* (label number 88096, L 6693, K-62), which was a charming adaptation of their 1952 film by the same name. The record features comic narration by Bud and Lou, with an uncredited appearance by famed voice actor Thurl Ravenscroft as *The*



Castle reissue label

Giant, and orchestration directed by Albert Harris.

The premise here is simple; Lou is going to tell Bud a story that he "made up himself" -- and proceeds to detail the well-known fairy tale of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. As usual, a skeptical

Bud constantly interrupts Lou's storytelling:

Of course, Bud is wise to Lou's deception and ultimately beats him to the punch by detailing the "happily ever after" ending himself, then chastises Lou and asks why he must tell such lies? The record closes with a deflated Costello shouting his catchphrase, "Ohhhh, I'm a baaaaaaaaaad boy!"

Recorded on 3/27/1952, in Los Angeles, the recording was issued as a ten-inch Decalite "Unbreakable Under Normal Use" disc, as well as a smaller 45rpm format (label number 9-88096, 45-L 6693).



Bud: Are you sure you made this story up?

Lou: Yeah, I made it up!

Bud: Out of your head?

Lou: What'd you say?

Bud: I said, "out of your head?"

Lou: And so are you.

Now keep your mouth shut and let me tell the story!



ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Even though *Jack and the Beanstalk* was their last official record release -- it was by no means the final record to feature the boys.

In May of 1956, it was announced that a gold record of *Who's on First?*, created to commemorate the 20th anniversary of their first performance of the routine, was to be enshrined at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. Of the honor, Lou is reported to have remarked, "This is many times better than getting an Oscar."



8 P.M.—Channel 4
STEVE ALLEN SHOW — Abbott and Costello (*Who's On First?*) will be admitted to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Mickey Mantle, New York Yankee slugger; Mrs. Babe Ruth, Singer Jaye P. Morgan, and Lionel Hampton are also on the guest list.

Amid the World Series, and just eight months prior to dissolving their partnership, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello appeared on NBC's *The Steve Allen Show*, Sunday October 7th, 1956 at 8PM, for the presentation. While holding the mounted commemorative record, Lou remarked "We just finished a picture about eight weeks ago, *Dance with Me, Henry*, for United Artists. And now we're here in New York, being with you, and all the wonderful people you have here, we have a wonderful plaque that's going to be presented to the Baseball Hall of Fame." Bud, sharing Lou's enthusiasm, said "That's a solid gold record that actually plays and will go to the Cooperstown Hall of Fame. And we're very, very proud and happy that you've accepted this." Following the presentation, they performed *Who's on First?* for what would become their final nationally televised performance of the sketch.

The record was placed in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, where it remains on public display.



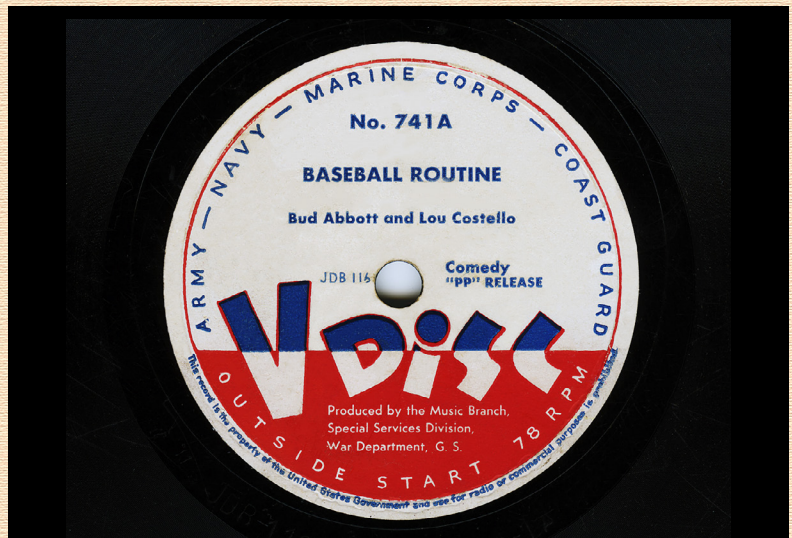
ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Special 10-inch vinyl giveaway copies of the gold *Who's on First?* record were pressed, each sporting a yellow label (approximating gold) commemorating the Cooperstown presentation. When these rare records turn up, many have been signed by the boys themselves!



Of course, there are also countless “unofficial” records pressed through-out the years which still exist in various formats including:

A 12-inch vinyl 78rpm V-Disc (short for Victory Disc) released in March 1947 under the title *Baseball Routine* — which features a longer version of *Who's on First?* — pressed for the government to be used exclusively for the entertainment of GIs.



Original 16-inch vinyl transcription discs of various radio broadcasts.



ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

Trailers. Exploitation, radio spots, and interview records were sent to radio stations to help promote the A&C films:



ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS

WARNER BROS.'

Spot Announcement

"ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET CAPTAIN KIDD"

MUSIC: (Orchestra up....and then to B.G.)

ANNCR. 1: Ahoy!

ANNCR. 2: A howl!

ANNCR. 1: They're raising cain on the bounding main!

ANNCR. 2: "ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET CAPTAIN KIDD"....co-starring none other than CHARLES LAUGHTON as Captain Kidd!

MUSIC: (Full orchestra up and then under)

ANNCR. 1: Shiver your timbers and shake with howls!

ANNCR. 2: It's one big roar from shore to shore!

MUSIC: (Orchestra up and then under)

ANNCR. 1: "ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET CAPTAIN KIDD".....Warner Bros.' new super riot!

ANNCR. 2: They go after pirate treasure and dig up a fortune in fun!

MUSIC: (Orchestra up and then under)

VOICE: Yo,ho,ho, it's a barrel of fun!

ANNCR. 2: Full of salty songs!

ANNCR. 1: And...saucy babes!

ANNCR. 2: And it's all in Super Cine Color!

MUSIC: (Orchestra up and then under)

ANNCR. 1: No kiddin'....it's great kiddin' when "ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET CAPTAIN KIDD"!

ANNCR. 2: A Woodley Production presented by Warner Bros. in Super Cine Color!

ANNCR. 1: Co-starring CHARLES LAUGHTON....and introducing that spicy songstress, FRAN WARREN!

MUSIC: (Orchestra up and out)

ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS



Too, both Bud and Lou received air checks of their various radio performances:



There are also countless reissues of their old broadcasts on LP, cassette, CD, and even MP3, from companies like BRC, Campbell Records, Holiday Records, Metacom, Nostalgia Lane, Murray Hill, Radio Spirits, Radiola, Radiex, and others.

ABBOTT & COSTELLO RECORDS



Congratulations to
BUD ABBOTT and LOU COSTELLO
whose tremendous boxoffice
appeal has been a most sig-
nificant achievement.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES COMPANY, INC.

Last, and perhaps the most intriguing entry, is a listing for an unreleased 10-inch "Special Test" which the boys appear to have made for Decca records (matrix DLA 2358) on January 6th, 1941 — eleven months before they recorded *Laugh, Laugh, Laugh*. Unfortunately, there are no other details available about this curious entry. The authors sincerely hope that the master recording, if it was preserved at all, did not fall victim to the 2008 Universal Studios vault fire as did so many other historic records. Research continues.

Both Bud and Lou are gone, but they left behind a vast wealth of recorded performances which are still being enjoyed by audiences around the world. All are precious reminders of what a remarkable comedy team they were.

Sources: The Abbott & Costello Story: Sixty Years of "Who's on First?" by Stephen Cox and John Lofflin, *Billboard* Magazine, CineMuseum LLC, Discography of American Historical Recordings (DAHR), Discogs.com, Gierucki Studios LLC, MediaHistoryProject.org, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Newspapers.com, *The Valley Times*, and *Variety*.



SHEMP SIGHTINGS

By Edward Watz

A wise person of discriminating taste once remarked, “Shemp Howard is the George Harrison of Stooges. Under-rated, und erappreciated — but the truly discerning recognize his brilliance.” I didn’t say those words of wisdom, but I agree with the sentiment wholeheartedly.

In feature films, Shemp appeared as support in other people’s movies, and he often filled a similar niche in his early Vitaphone shorts. Today, he is still a pop culture icon because of The Three Stooges, but he’s best remembered by the general public as being Curly’s replacement. Curly Howard’s onscreen catchphrase, “I’m a victim of coicumstance!” could almost be regarded as a real-life mantra for his big brother Shemp. Re-joining the Stooges in 1946, Shemp’s debut came about the time that Columbia Pictures was tightening the budgets of their two-reel comedy unit. By the time Shemp was back with Moe and Larry, elaborate sight gags and car chases, offsite location work, and big studio production values were a thing of the past. As production costs continued to soar, 18 of the later Shemp shorts were patched-together remakes relying on extensive use of stock footage. Worst of all, the team’s most prolific director, Jules White, was running low on inspiration by the early 1950s. By then, White often relied on silly non sequitur slapstick rather than genuine comedy routines.

In spite of these obstacles, Shemp Howard’s enormous talent often shines brightly. True, Shemp was by no means a comedy creator in the same league as Chaplin, Keaton, or W.C. Fields; he never wrote his scripts or directed a picture. But in the best sense of the word, Shemp was a “natural” comic; he had great rhythm and impeccable timing, an instinctive trait to be funny, and not in the over-the-top style of a Jimmy Durante, Robin Williams, or Milton Berle. Shemp was never desperate in going for laughs. To use a clich , Shemp made it all look so easy. “Shemp was an intuitive comic,” director Ed Bernds liked to say. “He didn’t say much when we were discussing a scene, but when the cameras started rolling, he’d let loose with improvisations and ad-libs that were simply hysterical.”

Now, if you happened to read my book on Wheeler & Woolsey (or maybe skimmed through it in a bookstore), you already know that I have great affection for the often overlooked comedians of Hol-

Shemp Howard

lywood’s past: I’m speaking of people like Chico Marx, Bud Abbott, and of course, Shemp Howard. These entertainers do their job, they entertain. But they’re also often taken for granted while the majority rhapsodize over Groucho, Harpo, Lou Costello, or Curly Howard.

Like myself, Shemp was a native of Brooklyn, born into a brownstone household in a working-class neighborhood. If my family didn’t have any characters as colorful as Shemp, we could still relate to him. Even during my 1960s childhood, there were a lot of Shemps sauntering around town.

Jules White once told me, “You

know, there wouldn’t be a Hollywood without Brooklyn.” I understood what he meant. Brooklyn in the early 20th Century bred a lot of New York show people, many of whom traveled west when the talkies arrived. Along with vaudevillians, headliners, and entire Broadway casts, Moe, Curly, and Shemp left their Bensonhurst homestead for the sunshine of Southern California. Shemp, however, frequently came back East to visit his friends and relatives. And that’s where my father, Alex Watz, comes into the picture. In 1942, Dad was 18 years old, and one of the shipyard workers at The Brooklyn Navy Yard, helping to



Art by Bil Barrett



Big Boy Guinn losing it all as Shemp pretends to cut his own finger PLEASED TO MITT YOU



build US warships to crush the Axis Powers during World War II. “Brooklyn USA has gone to war,” reported *The Brooklyn Citizen*, “and the navy yard is its biggest war plant.” During the first week of December, the navy yard marked the one-year anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor with a weeklong war bond drive. Musical concerts were held each day, as workers ended their shifts or took lunch breaks. On Monday, December 7, 1942, the final day of the bond drive, my Dad and his friend Vito Battista arrived late for the entertainment due to problems they experienced fitting an escape hatch onto a submarine conning tower. “I thought we’d be told to watch the show standing behind the audience,” Dad recalled. “In-

stead, we were ushered down to fifth row seats!” Instead of a musical performance (which was always accompanied by several attractive chorus girls), the workers were told they were going to watch a sketch stressing safety in the workplace, titled “Never Play in the (Navy) Yard.”

An audible groan went through the crowd. Then the sketch began. Onstage, several men, dressed as yard workers, were routinely instructed by a “safety director” on the best way to perform their tasks without causing injury to themselves and anyone around them. But one man, dressed as a welder and wearing a metal face shield, was ignoring the advice. Instead, he kept dropping his tools, and bumped into a gym locker, causing the surrounding lockers to fall over, domino-style. “Hey, you!” called the safety director. “What do you think you’re doing?” The “welder” stepped up to the footlights and lifted his mask. “Why, I’m woikin” he replied. It was Shemp!

Laughter now took the place of the groans as the audience realized it had been “set up” for a comedy routine. Vito, who was about 15 years older than Dad, told him, “That fellow used to be one of the Stooges when they were with Ted Healy.” Dad remembered telling Vito, “I know this funny guy is Shemp from the movies, but I

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THE MAN BEHIND THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN

REMEMBER
LAST
DECEMBER!

Vol. II, No. 3
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
December 7, 1942

Remember Last December—Pass the Bonds!

From the Commandant —
To All Employees:

This is December 7. Uppermost in our minds today should be the memory of Pearl Harbor. I sincerely hope we all are remembering intensely, and avenging intensely by buying bonds heavily.

Pearl Harbor Thanks
To Go to All Buyers

Will Use Special Envelope and Dec. 7
Postmark in Acknowledging
Each Purchase

The Brooklyn Navy Yard’s newspaper — on the day my Dad saw Shemp

never knew he was one of the Stooges.” Anyhow, back to the act: Shemp winds up in an argument with the safety director. Cream pies are mysteriously found in one of the lockers, and a pie fight ensues. According to Dad: “It was a very cold day, and Shemp took a bunch of pies square in the face. I was laughing, but I also felt sorry for the poor guy. The cream from the pie looked like it had frozen solid on his face! Right then and there I bought a \$20 war bond, mainly as a thank-you to poor Shemp!”

Three months later, in March 1943, Dad was drafted into the US Army, eventually participating in The Battle of The Bulge and serving in General Patton’s Honor Guard. In Germany after the war, Dad saw other top celebrity entertainers – Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna, and Frances Langford among them – but he told me that “Nobody gave as good a show or was as funny as Shemp. He was the best!”

Columbia Pictures’ soundman and later two-reel comedy director Ed Bernds admitted to me that Shemp was likewise his favorite Stooge. Ed also had his own unique Shemp encounter: “I had to go to New York in 1950 to shoot a pilot for the *Beulah* TV show starring Ethel Waters. While there, I stayed with my wife Betty’s aunt and uncle in Brooklyn. They owned a record store on Fulton Street, the main shopping center in Brooklyn Heights. I was with them when we rounded a corner and came face-to-face with Shemp! Well, the relatives were awestruck, and Shemp being a wonderful guy, was just happy to chat with them, joking about what a ‘crack the whip’ taskmaster I was as their director. It was years before Betty’s family stopped talking about their chance rendezvous with the great Shemp Howard.”

Ed also recalled his favorite Stooge as being sensitive and kind-hearted. Shemp lived in the Toluca Lake district, not far from the home of the



Christine McIntyre can’t keep a straight face as Shemp reacts in *Brideless Groom*.

other Stooges director, Jules White. One day, Shemp arrived at the studio, frazzled and shaking with rage. “Shemp told me that he saw Jules in his backyard with a rifle, shooting at birds in the trees. He said, ‘How d’ye like that guy, shootin’ at the poor little boidies!’” It was about an hour before Shemp calmed down sufficiently so that the Stooges could get to work.

Shemp did have his revenge, however, as Columbia comedy film buff Erwin Dumbrille recalled: “Jules White gave a lecture at my USC film class in 1952. Afterwards, he arranged for the students to visit Columbia during the filming of the Stooge short *Up in Daisy’s Penthouse*. We came on the day that only the Stooges were needed, filming the scene where the boys try on a closetful of fancy clothes. For all the low comedy antics he created, Jules liked to be perceived as being a wise man. It was just after lunch. As Jules patiently explained to the students what he, as director, hoped to achieve, Shemp broke wind – loudly! Jules stopped in mid-sentence, paused a moment, then continued his lecture. Shemp did this several more times until the entire class finally collapsed in laughter. Shemp

then hollered out something like, ‘Hey Jules, now tell ‘em about how we manufacture our own sound effects!’”

Comedian Eddie Quillan remembered an incident involving Shemp during the filming of the Universal feature *It Ain’t Hay* starring Abbott & Costello. “Shemp and I played a couple of wise guy racetrack characters. In our opening scene, Shemp is asked why he always carries an umbrella when the sun is shining. Shemp’s scripted line was, ‘How should I know? I’m a Damon Runyon character!’ Our director [Erle Kenton] thought the joke might go over the heads of the audience. We did another take, and this time when Shemp was asked why he always carries an umbrella, he answered, ‘Have you seen the size of the flying elephants they got around here?’ The whole set just collapsed in laughter. Abbott and Costello came over after hearing all the commotion. When told what it was all about, Lou said, ‘Shemp, you know I think you’re terrific, but come on, I’ve got to be



Shemp causes brother Moe to crack up in *Squareheads of The Round Table*.



Shemp with Roscoe Arbuckle and Lionel Stander in Roscoe's last film, *In The Dough*

the funniest guy, you gotta get your own movie!"

I'd have to say that about 35 of the 75 Shemp Stooges shorts are top-flight and as good as Curly's very best efforts. (Notice I didn't include the final four Stooge two-reelers after Shemp died, with Joe Palma filmed over the shoulder, from the back, behind props and covering his face, as Palma portrays "Fake Shemp.")

The shorts Shemp made in Brooklyn for Vitaphone in the 1930s are frequently wild and hilarious; they're also available on DVD and a bargain at any price. Plus, Shemp had bits and pieces in films that are barely worth watching except for his bits and pieces. If you should catch a woeful Universal "B" entitled *Six Lessons From Madame La Zonga* (1941), where some studio "genius" had the not-so-bright idea to have Shemp portray a mute, he still shines: watch the Conga line scene, where Shemp's fancy gyrations are the sole highlight of the film. Or catch *Private Buckaroo* (1942), where a bonafide studio genius realized that Shemp was walking away with the film, so all of his scenes were included in the final cut, making *Buckaroo* the closest thing to a feature film starring Shemp. The nominal "star" of the film, Joe E. Lewis, though lionized in his day, can't hold a candle to what Shemp creates in his scenes. And let's not forget *Another Thin Man* (1939) where Shemp, in his only MGM appearance, owns the film's finale, which is really saying something when you're working alongside Nick and Nora Charles.

Shemp frequently broke up



Shemp thanks his agent in this signed portrait

his costars with his on-set improvisations. The proof is in the pudding; you can see visual examples of them here. There's a classic outtake from Abbott & Costello's *Africa Screams* (1949) where Shemp, as a nearsighted sharpshooter, thinks he's following Lou, but it's actually a chimpanzee he's pursuing. Shemp's running ad-libs are hilarious, concluding with him telling the ape, "Whatsa matter, you've been eating olives, eh?" which breaks up the crew.

One last brief anecdote: I used to work in advertising, and one of my assignments in the 1990s was to encourage tradesmen to co-op with my company on promotional campaigns. One of my clients was an aging plumber in Brooklyn. In the course of our dealings, somehow (I don't recall exactly why) The Three Stooges came up. "I liked those guys," the plumber said, his face beaming. "And you know who was the funniest? Shemp! His wife was related to my family, and we'd see them here at all the big weddings and family parties. Shemp entertained all of us kids. He could make everybody laugh; we always looked forward to seeing him again. He was our Pied Piper!"



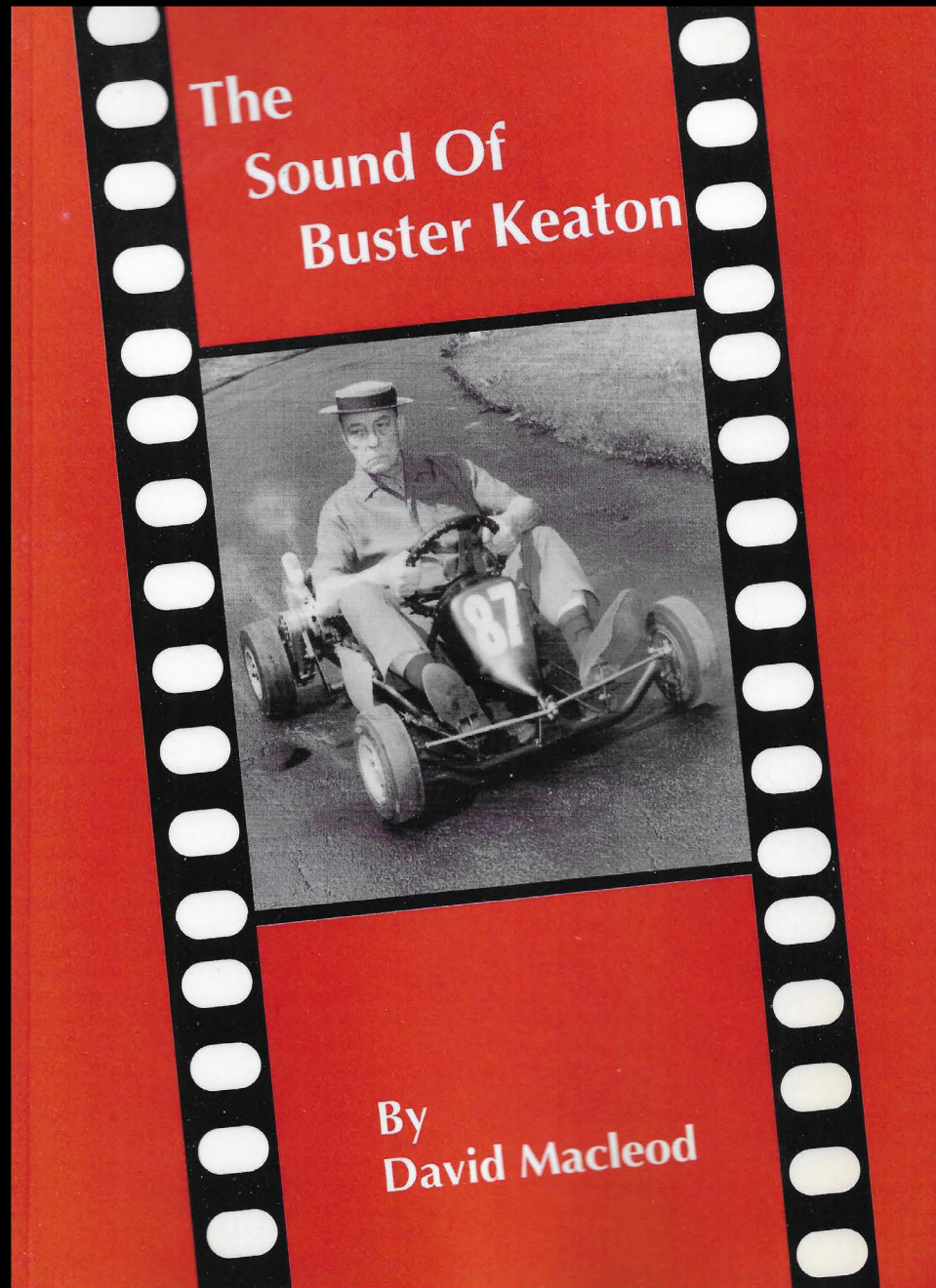
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Television's Unsung Comedy Hero

By Dean Vanderkolk

For most writers, contributing to the creation of the beloved *Carol Burnett* sketch “Went With The Wind” would be enough to ensure immortality. Crafting the solo night club act of Dean Martin would place them in the pantheon of greats. Beginning your writing career as a partner with Norman Lear and attending a writing session in which Jerry Lewis summoned you into a darkened room, the only glow coming from a lit candle — inserted into Jerry’s penis — well, it certainly *should* give you *some* measure of fame. Do those things, and more, and you’d be a shoo-in to be Ed Simmons, one of television’s true unsung heroes. Writing for luminaries such as Red Skelton, Sid Caesar, Jerry Lewis, Dean Martin, Danny Thomas and others, he was present on the ground floor of television and helped to create some of that medium’s most memorable moments.

Through an odd turn of events, I met and became friends with Ed’s daughter, Erica, long before I realized that yes, she was the daughter of *that* Ed Simmons. Over the years, she has delighted me with tales of her late father’s career, and I’m pleased by this opportunity to have her sit down for a formal interview.

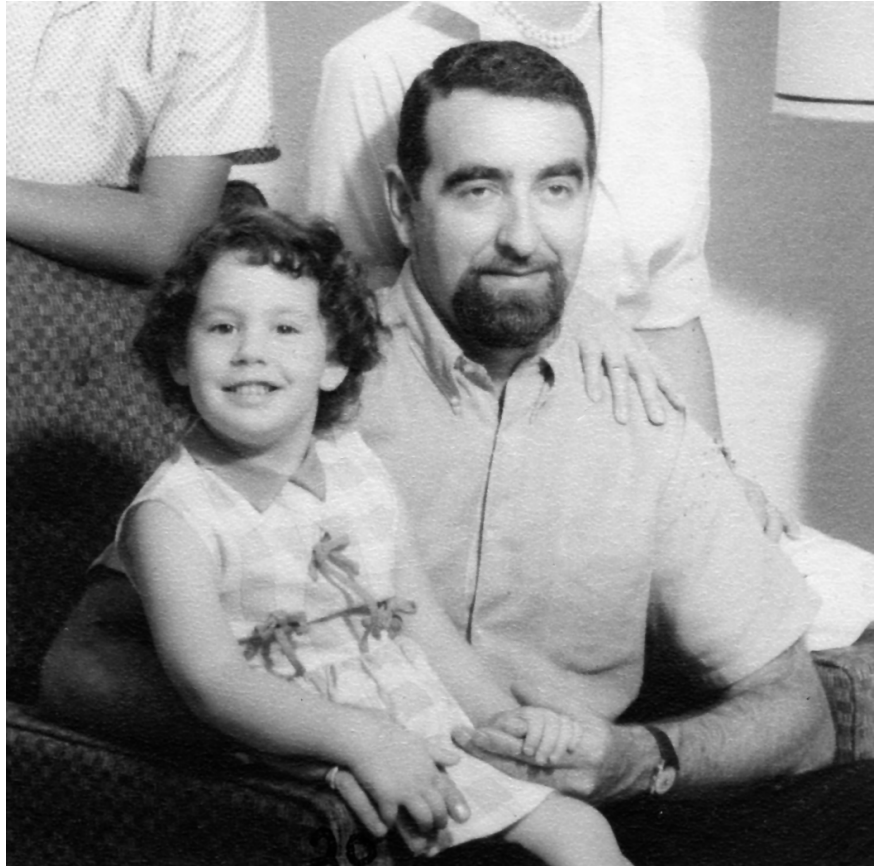
RV: Where was your dad born and when?

ES: Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1919.

RV: And, as an adult, why did he make the trek out to California?

ES: I think both he and Norman came out here to find work in Hollywood. They were working as baby photographers at the time, selling furniture and doing other kinds of weird stuff while trying to break into show business. I don’t know why they came to California because New York was right there, but they didn’t ask me.

RV: (laughs) And for those people who may not know, who was Norman?



Ed Simmons with his daughter Erica

ES: Norman Lear. He is my cousin on my mother’s side, my mother’s first cousin — she grew up with him — and my father and Norman were writing partners way back when.

RV: You mentioned a lot of the odd jobs that he and your dad did — stories echoed in Norman’s own biography — the furniture gig and selling baby photos. Those seem like particularly strange types of jobs. What were they like?

ES: (laughs) Well, for the baby photo gig, they would go through various neighborhoods and look for homes that had toys or bicycles left out on the lawn, and that would let them know that children lived there. One of them, usually

Norman, would then present the “lady of the house” with a coupon for a free 8 x 10 photo taken by their staff photographer, Mr. Simmons, and set up an appointment for the photo shoot the next day in their own home. Of course, at the same time, my dad was knocking on



Erica today

other doors offering free photo shoots with the wonderful photographer, Mr. Lear. Then, the next day, they'd each visit the homes the other had lined up, take the photos, and try to upsell the families into buying extra prints.

RV: (laughs) That almost sounds like a sketch itself! The job that really intrigued me was what seemed to be their first professional sale in show business, which involved a professional wrestler; is that true?

ES: (laughs. Hard.) The story as my dad used to tell it is that they were hired to come up with a gimmick for a professional wrestler. All the good wrestlers had gimmicks, and my dad and Norman learned that this guy was a baritone who could reach a very high tenor note, so the gimmick they sold him was that when he got someone in a compromising position, he would sing high tenor into their ear-



Norman Lear, Jerry Lewis and Ed Simmons

drums, shattering them, and that's how he would win the match.

RV: (laughs) That sounds painful.

ES: Yeah, definitely. And I'm sure this is as real as all the other pro wrestling stuff out there.

RV: What made Norman and your dad decide to become writing partners?

ES: Well, one evening, my dad, Norman and both of their wives were sitting around the house while my dad was writing a song parody. Norman asked to see it, and he helped him finish it. From there, for whatever reason, they decided to try to sell it, and they went out that very night to a night club and sold it to a lady named Carol Abbott for \$40 on the spot! Since neither of them made more than \$50 a week in the baby photo business, they thought they were doing pretty well!

RV: That's great money for the time!

ES: Definitely! Soon after that, they got their first big client — Danny Thomas. Do you know how they got involved with him?

RV: I seem to recall that Norman was the one who kind of wormed his way in the door to sell him comedy material...

ES: Yeah, that's exactly right. Norman lied to Danny's secretary, and said he was a reporter who had been working on an interview with Danny Thomas and needed to reach him for one final question before he caught his plane, so she gave him Danny Thomas's home phone number!

RV: Oh, my God...

ES: Norman called Danny and pitched the thing to him; Danny Thomas was intrigued and said, "come on over right now." Norman said "well, I can't, but we'll be there by six." So, Thomas was shouting "you live 20 minutes from me, what's the problem?" and Norman said, "I have other things to do." What Danny didn't know was that what Norman had to do was find my father and write the bit! They had nothing!

RV: (laughs) Oh, that is just brilliant.

ES: Fortunately, Danny liked the sketch, so they went from there, as I understand it, to writing



Norman Lear, Ed Simmons and Colgate Comedy Hour producer Ernest Glucksman

for his night club, and that led to a job writing for Jack Haley, who everyone remembers as the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz*.

RV: So, things just kept snowballing from there?

ES: Oh, yes! On *The Jack Haley Show*, they wrote a routine that was seen by Jerry Lewis, and he liked it so much he wanted my dad and Norman to write for him and Dean Martin.

RV: That's how they began their association with Martin and Lewis. What can you tell us about that?

ES: My father and Norman, they wrote for *The Colgate Comedy Hour* for, I think, two or three years, and during that time they socialized a lot, not so much with Dean, but with Jerry and his wife at the time. I have pictures of my mother, father, and Norman socializing with the Lewises and (laughter) I have a picture of my dad and Norman out in Jerry Lewis's back yard, hanging themselves from a tree. I don't know why...

RV: Like, by a noose?

ES: Yes!

RV: Oh, my God!

ES: They're standing there with nooses around their necks and tied to a tree like "oh my God,

get us out of this!" (laughs)

RV: Now, if that was near the end of their relationship with Jerry, I could understand the photo, but...

ES: (laughs) Jerry could be difficult, um, he was challenging. I mean you saw the picture of him going around with scissors and ripping up people's clothes, and that clip that I sent you once a long time ago...

RV: Oh! Yes! That's the bit where your dad and Norman appear on camera with Jerry and the premise of it is that whenever the camera is on, Jerry is a wonderful person, and the minute the camera goes off...

ES: He's a monster.

RV: But does it seem like an accurate representation of what it was like based on what your dad had told you?

ES: It does. But a lot of people had that problem with Jerry. When my father had passed away and I was in his apartment going through his stuff, the phone rang and I answered it. It was somebody from some film or TV society; they wanted to interview my father. I said "I'm sorry, but Mr. Simmons passed away," and she said "oh, I'm so sorry blah, blah, blah. Well, we wanted to ask him about Jerry Lewis and what it was like working with



him and so forth." I mentioned my dad wasn't a fan and she said that based on her experiences, folks who worked with Jerry were divided into two groups: those who thought he walked on water, and those who wanted to hold him under the water. I could tell you for sure my dad was one of the latter.

RV: That's really interesting, because initially, from what I understand, Jerry was very, very gung-ho on your father and Norman, including taking out a full-page ad in *Variety* promoting them.

ES: Yes, but within three to four years, that association ended. *TV Guide* did a profile of my dad and Norman, and how they were the highest paid writers in television and Jerry immediately fired them. He couldn't stand that. He didn't like people getting more press than he did.

RV: But your dad ended up going back to work for Jerry in the 1960s.

ES: Yeah, I don't quite understand that. Because I know it was a miserable experience. I know he hated it, and the show was a flop, but I don't...

RV: Was that the talk show that Jerry tried to do?

ES: No, it was another variety show, but it was just Jerry this time. You know, him doing his usual schtick with guest stars and so forth, but it didn't click.

RV: So, as I understand it, from Martin and Lewis they kept writing for different people; they went on to work with Martha Raye on *The Martha Raye Show*. Do you know if either your dad or Norman had any recollections of that?

ES: I remember talking to Norman about her once; he was talking about how crazy she was, and how wild she was to work with. Always improvising and ad-libbing and doing all kinds of crazy schtick. Things like, sitting there pouring wine, or whatever, then she'd pour some into her hand and spritz under her arms with it. It was weird. And I can picture her doing that. She did seem kind of crazy, didn't she?

RV: She definitely did. (laughs)

ES: By the way, did you know that Buster Kea-



Lewis, Simmons and Lear

ton was a guest on that show when my dad was writing for it?

RV: Wow! Do you happen to know if they had any interaction with him?

ES: Sadly, they didn't get to write material for him. Martha and Buster did a version of the final comedy scene from Chaplin's *Limelight*, so I'm thinking that Buster brought that piece in on his own to do on the show. I know my dad loved him. You and my dad have that in common; my dad loved him. He loved the silent film era.

RV: Well, I can imagine that must have been a huge thrill for him to be a part of that. Your father did a lot of work on variety shows back then. He did *The George Gobel Show*, *The Tom Ewell Show*, and *The Dinah Shore Show*, and then he started working for Red Skelton.

ES: (rueful laugh) Yes?

RV: What can you tell us about that?

ES: Alright, well, here's the deal. A lot of this, I don't know whether it's them or my dad, because my dad... aaah, you know, I loved the man, brilliant man, but he had a lot of opinions about people, and he didn't like a lot of performers. I used to ask him, I remember saying "Hey, Dad, what was so-and-so like," and the answer was always the same thing. "Eh, he's an actor." And he would say "actors are a different breed." I don't know much about the Skelton years, but my dad told me about how he quit the show, and how they wanted him back. They met with him and said "oh, please, Mr. Simmons, we'd love to have you back, blah, blah, blah. Is there anything we can



Lewis, Simmons, Lear, unidentified, Dean Martin

do to convince you to come back?" He said "well, there's only one way I'd come back. You have to get rid of somebody." They said "who?" and he said, "Red Skelton."

RV: (laughs) I imagine they weren't willing to budge on that point.

ES: No. (laughs) No.

RV: One of the things that some of these performers have in common, when I've watched old episodes of *The Red Skelton Show*, for example, is that they're wonderful people as long as everything goes perfectly well. And the minute something doesn't, they turn. Attacking people on the air over mistakes and things like that. Was that commonplace with your dad's experience?

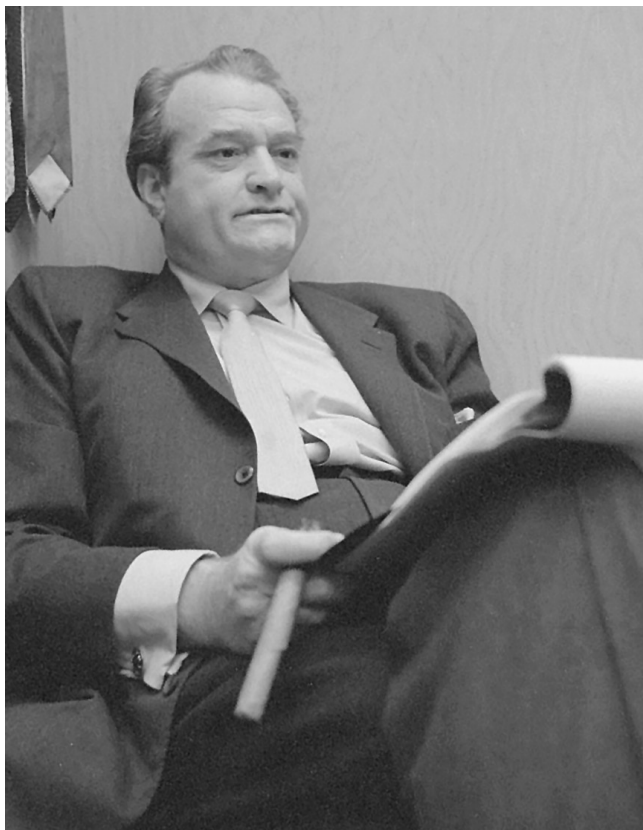
ES: I think so. And the ego. The ego and having to deal with all of that and my dad of course had his own ego, so he clashed with people. I mean, I can probably count on one hand the people he worked with that he actually liked. Carol Burnett was one of them. But, I don't know, it seemed like a difficult time. Television was very hectic, also, because it was a new medium, and people were dealing with all kinds of things that have been long resolved since then, but they were so fresh and new, it was nerve-wracking. It was live, and I think they had to deal with a lot of temperament.

RV: Yeah, that had to be an incredible pressure-cooker atmosphere. Now, your dad and Mr. Lear wrote together for a while and then things sort of dried up, which apparently led to the end of their partnership. Do you know anything about why that happened?

ES: The two of them had been going through a bit of a dry spell as writers and had been out of work for a while when they got offered a show. Now, to do the show, they would have had to have taken a big pay cut from their regular established salaries, and my dad wasn't willing to do that, so they split up.

RV: What seemed interesting to me was that after that, they don't seem to have worked together on anything. Were there any hard feelings about the split?

ES: You know, it's strange. For one thing, my father and my mother got divorced. And Norman was my mother's cousin, so that was awkward. And, I think on my father's end for a lot of years there were hard feelings. Not on Norman's end, but definitely on my father's. I'm not sure why. I do know that toward the end they made peace and my father even had him come speak at the place where he used to volunteer, talk to seniors about writing and so forth. He



Red Skelton

had Norman come and be a guest for that, so all was well at the end.

RV: Well, it's too bad that they didn't stick together. I mean, Mr. Lear might have amounted to something, had that happened.

ES: (big laugh) Yeah, I know, right? It's such a shame.

RV: Like a lot of other writers, your dad seemed to try his hand at creating a few television shows. And as I've looked at them, they've all struck me as being, well... "high-concept" would be an understatement.

ES: (laughs) Are you talking about *Where's Everett?*?

RV: *Where's Everett* is definitely one of them!

ES: It was in the mid-1960s, I think, and during the time when there was all this weird fantasy stuff on television, *Bewitched*, and *I Dream of Jeannie*, and so forth, and *Where's Everett?* was a show about a baby that was abandoned on a young couple's doorstep; the catch was that the baby was invisible. Hence, the name, *Where's Everett?* By the way, the name is a joke because Everett was my father's birth name. Anyway, I don't remember who played the wife, but the young man was Alan Alda.

RV: Oh, really? Interesting!

ES: So, this whole thing was about this couple struggling with how to deal with this baby who they can't see. It was pretty weird. It didn't sell, unfortunately.

RV: Alan Alda seems to be a guy that your dad did get along with.

ES: Oh, my dad loved Alan. One of his favorite stories was about something Alan said that absolutely put him on the floor. Apparently, they were meeting for lunch, and Alan, who had said "I've got enough kids," decided he was going to get a vasectomy, and was nervous about it. My dad, who had already had one, said "look, it's no big deal. It's really not that big a deal. Just think of it as if all they're doing is snipping two little pieces of spaghetti." And Alan said

"it's not the spaghetti I'm worried about, it's the meatballs."

RV: (laughs) Now there's another show that he produced which did go to series, called *The Second Hundred Years*.

ES: Yes! Yeah, I think that was ahead of its time. It was a very clever premise, I thought. Monte Markham played a man who had, years and years ago, been trapped in an avalanche, and was cryogenically preserved in the ice. Meanwhile, his son grew up and had a son, and then Monte somehow got thawed out and came back to a world that he did not recognize, where his son was old enough to be his father, and his grandson was his own age. Monte Markham played a dual role and Arthur O'Connell played the dad, or the son, actually, but he was more like his dad, and it was

SID'S KID

A Thirty Minute Human Comedy

(Story Line for Opening Episode)

Created by:

Ed Simmons
Christopher Brough
Larry Shultz

Registered WGAw 1984

TEASER:

Establishing shot of a two story, eight unit apartment house off Fountain Avenue in West Hollywood. Dissolve through to Apartment 1A and we see Sid. He is wearing shorts and is strenuously working out on his chin up bar. We immediately establish that Sid, no kid he, could give Tom Selleck a run for his money in the beefcake department. After going through a few intricate exercises, there is a knock on the door. Sid's back is to the door. He shouts that the door is open.

Angle on door as Geri enters. She carries a pair of battered suitcases. She says hello and Sid, with his back to her, continuing his exercises, says sorry, no vacancies. She says she doesn't need a vacancy, she's going to stay with him. Sid reacts, slowly drops to his feet and faces her.

She announces that she is his daughter, he is incredulous, announces that he doesn't have a daughter, never had a daughter and also doesn't want a daughter so goodbye, Miss Whoever You Are. She smiles, closes door behind her, sits on one of the suitcases and says the equivalent of "we'll talk about that later. Where do I put my bags?"

END OF TEASER

OPENING TITLES OVER MONTAGE AND THEME MUSIC

A set of quick establishing beats of Geri leaving home, going to airport, getting on plane, arriving in LAX, etc. During plane ride, we see her fondly looking at a handful of photographs. They are of a younger Sid in various comic costumes and poses.

END OPENING TITLES

FIRST COMMERCIAL

ACT I

Living room, continuous from teaser. He tells her she can put her bags outside. During this, he realizes he is stripped to the waist and puts his shirt on. She asks for a chance to explain



Geri Jewell

all those fish out of water things. For instance, the first thing he does when he comes into the house is, he sees a television set with cowboys shooting each other and he pulls out a gun and shoots the TV set. Stuff like that.

RV: That show debuted very strongly but, from what I read, it seems to have been a victim of the backlash against rural comedy, since this was sort of a variation on that.

ES: Yeah. There were probably too many of those things. It just wasn't its time.

RV: Did it ever frustrate your dad in that so many of his contemporaries had such luck with getting things off the ground, and it didn't seem to work for him?

ES: I'm sure it must have. I mean, it has to be frustrating when you've got things that you think are going to work, and you think they're brilliant, you put your heart and soul into them, and then people say "eh." It's hard. I mean, even Norman, who has had all those successes, he's had his flops, too.

RV: I'm going to jump ahead a little bit here because there's a particular show that I'm really intrigued about. This is something that I desperately wish had gone to series. Can you tell us a little bit about Sid's Kid?

ES: Oh, dang. I wish that had made it, oh, I wish so much. Sid's Kid was something that my father wrote with Sid Caesar and the performer Geri Jewell, are you familiar with her?

RV: Yes, she had a recurring role on *The Facts of Life*, playing a character with cerebral palsy, which she has in real life.

ES: I think she was the first person with a disability to ever get a recurring role on a television show. Anyway, my dad came up with the idea of Sid being this old bachelor guy, and then Geri turns up on his doorstep and says, "Hi, I'm your daughter." And then you can kind of take it from there. He finds out he has a grown daughter that he never knew he had. My father and Sid got together and there was a lot of — I guess there was a lot of collaborating. I did not know about this until many years after the fact, because it was in 1984, and I didn't find out about it until I read Geri Jewell's autobiography, so it kind of came as a shock. I had no idea. And then, when she and I became friends, she gave me one of the scripts from the show. Geri was concerned that the show was not going to be picked up and that it would be her fault.

RV: Oh, no.

ES: And she called my dad and urged him to recast the part. He refused, saying that both he and Sid wanted her, and that was the way it was going to be. And then to circle it back to Norman Lear, apparently, at some point, she gave a copy of the script to Norman after it had failed, and he was flabbergasted. He said "this is one of the best things I've ever read. I can't understand why this didn't go." It's a shame, because Sid Caesar, I think, was due a comeback. I mean, this was at the end of a 20-year bender for him; he had gone through rehab and he was ready to come back again and be funny, and they wouldn't give him a chance. It kinda sucked.

RV: I have to agree.

ES: Anyway, my dad worked on a few more things prior to all that. He was the head writer on *This is Tom Jones*, for instance. Of course, I never got to meet Tom Jones because it was in England, but my dad

did get me an autographed picture and a letter from him. (laughs) That was like the biggest thrill of my eleven-year-old life.

RV: Heck, I might have even been thrilled by that!

ES: And then he worked on a show with Don Adams called *The Partners*. That was another one that made it to air for about a year but then disappeared. It was a spoof of detective shows, where Don Adams and his partner Rupert Crosse were not particularly competent detectives, and most of the shows were centered around the fact that the two partners would argue about absolutely anything and everything interminably. I think Rupert Crosse was the straight man and Don Adams was doing *Maxwell Smart 2.0*. So, that's kind of like what it ended up being, I'm afraid.

RV: Now if I have the timeline correct, after that in 1973 your dad went to work on a tiny little show that seems to have developed a bit of a following over the years?

ES: (laughs) Aah, *The Carol Burnett Show*. That was his crowning glory. He worked on that show from 1973 through 1978. He was the head writer and the producer, and it was, I think, one of the best experiences of his life. He loved working with Carol, and he used to tell me cool stories of what it



Sid Caesar

was like being there and how funny it was and “this one is this and that one is that.” He told me that at the end of the season they would do a “flip show” where they would have the writers and all the other background people come and do kind of a satire of the show. One season my dad wrote a big monologue about what it was like working with these people. One of my favorite parts of that was “Monday, December 1st, Harvey complained that he didn’t have enough lines. Monday, December 8th, Harvey complained that he had too many lines. Monday, December 15th, Harvey complained that everything was just fine.” And then there were things like, “Tuesday, December 2nd, Vicki said hello.” And then later in the monologue, “Monday, January 3rd, Vicki said hello again.” Apparently, she wasn’t very effusive (laughs). Another funny one was “Monday, January 14th, Anthony Newley finally learned a line. Unfortunately, it was Harvey’s.” He was roasting everybody. I seem to recall that after the end of all that, they hit him with a pie.

RV: Now, is it true that when it came to the sketches that Tim and Harvey did, that they would do them once as written and then once for Tim?

ES: Oh, well, they always had two tapings, because they knew Tim was going to do everything he could to break Harvey up. So they figured they’d have one show where they’d let him do his thing and just wreck the place, and wreck Harvey, then they’d have another one where he would play it more straight. Then they would kind of merge



“Went With the Wind”

the best of the two. But a lot of the stuff where Harvey broke up and Tim went crazy ended up being the funniest, so they put that on the air!

RV: Did that ever cause any frustration among the writers?

ES: I think it frustrated Harvey more than anybody else because he was a perfectionist and considered himself the consummate performer. He hated when he broke up. Not that he got mad at Tim, but he got mad at himself. He thought he should have more control than that, but you know, damn, how could you not laugh?

RV: I would not trust anybody who could be in the middle of that and not laugh. So your dad won five Emmys for his years on the *Carol Burnett Show*, right?

ES: He did. I remember watching the Emmys on TV. I told you my dad had a bit of an ego, and when the writers got their awards and this whole big team of writers went trooping up on stage, he wanted to stand out, so everybody else had a black tux, and he had a maroon tux with a pink shirt. That was my dad.

RV: One of my frustrations in trying to learn more about your father’s career is that so much seems undocumented. For example, I know he worked with Marty Feldman, but I can’t find any record of it.

ES: Marty Feldman and my dad were very good friends. I think

they tried to develop and work on certain things, but I don’t think anything ever came of it. It was, again, one of those circumstances where you come up with something and you try this and you do that but it doesn’t work. I remember more about Marty being a guest at our house than I do anything else.

RV: I can’t imagine what it was like to have Marty at your house.

ES: Oh, my God. (laughs) Well, what you saw on TV and in the movies was who he was. I mean, the guy was manic. He was manic and he was crazy and he was so – damn – funny! And sweet. He was a really sweet guy. At that time, my dad was married to his second wife and he had a house in Beverly Hills, and Marty and his wife, Lauretta, whenever they came to the states they would stay at my dad and stepmother’s house, in the spare bedroom, so they’d hang with us. I remember that Marty was a vegetarian, and my stepmother used to prepare separate dishes for him. She used to make things like, if we were having a party, she made a lasagna with meat and then a lasagna without meat for Marty. And he was very accident-prone. He once walked right into a closed screen door and split his nose open. Yeah, he just walked right into the screen door, because the lights



One of Ed Simmons’ Emmy Awards



Dean Martin

were off and he couldn't see that it was closed, he had that big ol' nose that stuck out and bam! (laughs) Poor guy. But he was so sweet, and he made me laugh.

RV: Do you have a favorite story about him?

ES: After my dad got divorced, unfortunately, and we didn't have the house anymore, Marty and Laurretta were staying in a hotel. I think I was about 16 at the time, and my dad and I went to visit them. There was a bunch of people there and the Feldmans were entertaining, and Marty came up to me and said, in his inimitable British accent, "Erica, love, would you like something to drink?" I didn't want anything, so I said, "no, thank you."

Him: "Are you sure? Wine?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Soda?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Water?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Milk?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Coffee?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Tea?"

Me: "No thank you."

Him: "Well, fuck you, then!"

Me: "Well, fuck you, too." (laughs)

RV: (laughs) I'm assuming that, while there was certainly interaction with the people your father worked with, it was not a "show business" household. There weren't

stars over all the time, that sort of thing.

ES: Oh, God, no. My dad socialized more with the writers, his fellow writers and so forth than he did with the performers.

RV: He seems to have moved from writing into a producer position in the '70s and '80s, for instance he was a supervising producer on *Welcome Back, Kotter*, and *Mama's Family*. Did he enjoy that better than writing, or did he still have his hand in the writing?

ES: I think he still had his hand in it. I think he still, you know, had input. *Mama's Family*, as you know, was a spin-off from the *Carol Burnett* sketches, so he had a hand in that the first year. *Kotter* was only the last season, which is unfortunate, because that was where they kind of jumped the shark. But I remember my dad... I'll never forget this because, like I said, my dad did not like too many performers. Do you know who he really, really liked and thought was a great kid? John Travolta.

RV: Really?

ES: Yeah! He said he was one of the nicest people he's ever met. So there you have it.

RV: Can we talk a little bit about Dean Martin? Shortly after your father and Norman were let go by Jerry, the infamous Martin-Lewis split occurred. As I understand it, your dad continued to help Dean with a number of things.

ES: Yeah. Apparently, and I read this in Deana Martin's autobiography, *Memories Are Made of This*, so there's confirmation, when Dean was first separated from Jerry, he was kind of floundering, not sure what direction he was

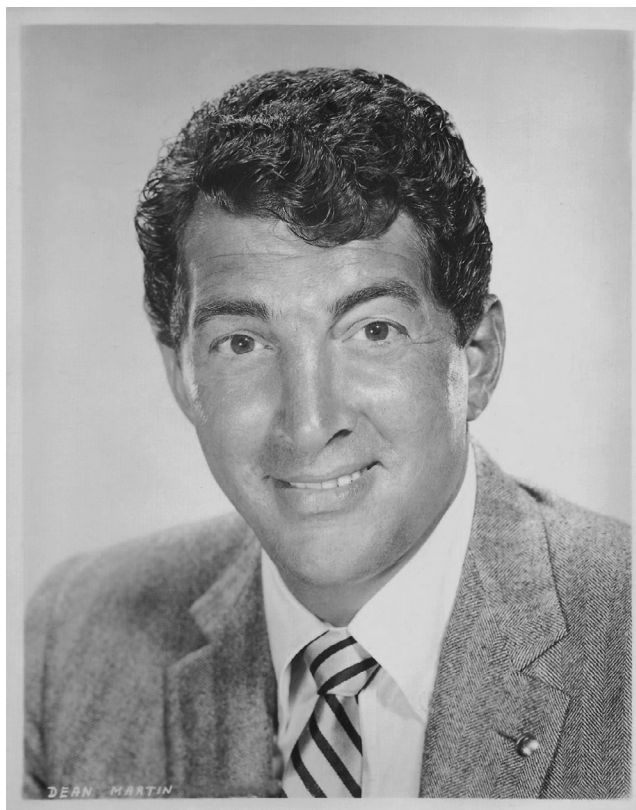
going to go in. He sought my father's help. Dean asked, what kind of act should I do? What do I do with the clubs, and this and that? And my father helped him develop his "drunk" persona. His loveable drunk. You know, with the drink in one hand, the cigarette in the other, and just kind of slurring (laughs). I've never known, honest to God, I've never known if he... I mean, people say, oh, yes, he was a drunk and then other people say no, no, no, he was just faking it. I've never known which it was.

RV: He had an amazing gift for making anything that he did seem 100% natural, and off the cuff. That's a rare talent. He also seemed to be somebody who everybody liked, but everybody says they never really knew him.

ES: He was very shy, very quiet. I know my father had written some poems that he had self-published, then wrote a sequel to it, and one of the poems that he never published was written right after Dean Martin's death. I don't remember what he said in it, but the name of it was "Arrivederci Dino." So, it was written with fondness. I think my dad liked him, but they were never close, because Dean kept his cards close to the vest.

RV: Both your dad and Norman are on record as saying that they honestly believed that Dean was quite often the funnier of the pair, and this was not something that Jerry handled particularly well.

ES: Oh, I would believe that. (laughs) I mean, Jerry was the more flamboyant one, but Dean had wonderful timing, he had great reactions. You know, it's hard work to be a straight man, you have to have amazing timing. I mean, everybody looks at Sid Caesar, and says "oh, it's Sid Caesar," and watches him be crazy on screen, but Carl Reiner, to work with him, had to be

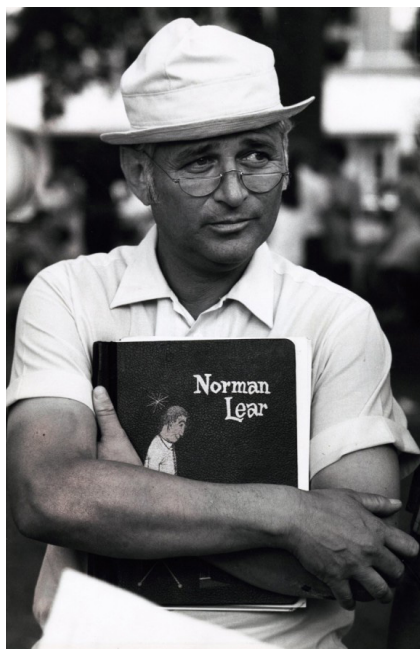


Dean Martin

frickin' brilliant.

RV: Carl Reiner may have been the most gifted straight man ever in the business.

ES: I have a story about Carl. Norman Lear and Carl Reiner were really good, lifelong friends. And, oh, about 15-20 years ago, Norman's son had a bar mitzvah, so my mother, my stepfather and I were invited, and I brought my boyfriend John. I don't know if you've ever been to a bar mitzvah, but, lemme tell ya, I don't care whose bar mitzvah it is, bar mitzvahs are boring. They're long, and they're boring. You sit there, and you fidget, and it goes on and on and on, and you can't wait to get out of there. So, when it was finally over, I remember it was a beautiful day outside, John and I practically ran out of the temple. As we stepped outside, and were a few feet away from the door, John grabbed me and kissed me. I don't know why he did that, but he did. And then the next thing I heard was somebody saying, "I saw that!" I turned around and who was standing in the doorway? Carl! I thought, "oh, okay," and I said, "do you want to see it again?" And he said "yeah!" So, John and I kissed again, and he blurted "no tongue! You're in



Carl Reiner

front of a shul!" And for the rest of the day, he referred to us as "the kissing fools" with a big grin.

RV: Were your dad and you close growing up?

ES: No... I mean, it was a dysfunctional household. My parents didn't get along; they got divorced when I was six. My father was married and divorced twice more after that. I lived with my mother for a few years, then I lived with him for a few years, and then he and I had a falling out and we didn't speak to each other for several years. (sigh) Yeah. The good news is it all came together in the last ten years of his life. My father unfortunately had a drinking problem, he had been an alcoholic since he was in his teens, and in his last ten years, he got sober, and went through a personality overhaul. I mean, I know there was always a kind and loving person in there, but without the alcohol and without the bravado and the arrogance and all the other stuff that was covering it over, it was a lot more evident. And, yeah, he was quite a mensch. Quite a mensch in his last ten years, if you know what that means.

RV: I do. A good guy, a person of integrity and honor.

ES: Exactly. Going back to Geri Jewell — apparently, when they got together to work, she couldn't hear him very well and kept asking him to repeat things. My father called her and said, "what's going on?" and she said "well, I need hearing aids but they're expensive and when the show sells, I'll buy them, okay?" So, the next time they meet at Sid Caesar's house, my father handed her an envelope, and written on

the outside of the envelope was "now hear this." She opened the envelope and there was a note that said, "you will not wait until the show sells, you are going to go buy yourself hearing aids now." And there was \$1500 in cash in there.

RV: That's very sweet.

ES: At Dad's memorial, the writer Frank Tarloff spoke. Tarloff was blacklisted during the McCarthy Era, and I did not know this, but my father fronted for him. He ghostwrote some of his scripts. That's what they did back then: the blacklisted writers would write a script and then another writer who wasn't blacklisted would put their name on it and sell it and then give them the money. That's how people had to live back then. A lot of careers were destroyed, and a lot of suicides happened, but Frank survived and prevailed. I don't know how many things my dad did for him, but finding out my dad was a front was quite a shock.

RV: Is that something that you just would not have pictured your dad doing?

ES: I do, and yet I don't. I do know my dad was not in the least bit political. He couldn't care less about any of it, so he was the last person that anybody would suspect. That was probably the reason why it worked so well. Nobody would even think about him being a Communist or politically leaning this way or that, or doing that sort of thing for a blacklisted writer, so he kind of slipped under the radar.

RV: That's very brave.

ES: Well, this was typical of my dad, because you know, he never wanted to make a big fuss out of things, he just liked to joke about them. In 1994, there was a huge earthquake here. It



The Carol Burnett Show: Clockwise from top — Vicki Lawrence, Harvey Korman, Burnett, Tim Conway.

trashed my place, trashed the area, and the office where I was working at the time, so I lost a week's work. There was a lot of stuff in my place that was broken, it was a mess. The next thing I knew, I got a note, an envelope in the mail, with my dad's return address and handwriting on it. I opened it up and there was a check for \$500 and a little note that said, "I thought it would be a good idea to contribute to the earthquake fund." So, yeah. That's who he was.

RV: You mention that he was three times married. Am I right that one of his wives was involved in show business, as well?

ES: Yes. His second wife, Sylvia Lewis, who is very much with us at age 89, thank you very much; she and I are still close even though she divorced my father when I was 15. She appeared in *The Ladies' Man* (1961) with Jerry Lewis and had heard all the stories about what



Sylvia Lewis

a nightmare he was, how awful and disrespectful he was, and how he treated the women. You know, he was sexist and creepy and just ugh, not nice. For whatever reason, she never was able to figure it out, he treated her with the utmost respect. I think he had a crush on my stepmother because he adored her.

RV: She's the lady in black, correct?

ES: Yes. Miss Cartilage. She only has one line, like "hi, honey" or something like that, and the rest of the time she doesn't speak.

RV: I've got to tell you, I've seen that film several times, and every time that scene comes on, I think "what the hell is this? I don't understand a minute of this."

ES: (laughs) I know! It's so weird. When the film wrapped, she went to work on a stage play. Opening night, the play was sold out. Jerry came anyway and stood up, in the back of the theater, for the entire performance. When the play was over, he went backstage to congratulate Sylvia, and to surprise her with a gift, a necklace on a white-gold chain with one large pearl and three diamonds. She loved it so much, she wore it for 50 years. And then about eight years ago, she decided she was too old to wear it and gave it to me. Definitely one of my most treasured possessions. Oh! One more small story as an adjunct to that — when my dad was writing for Jerry Lewis's solo variety show, Sylvia was working as part of the cast. She told me that Jerry specifically made a point of coming to my dad and saying, "Please don't write me having to do anything humiliating or embarrassing to Sylvia — I don't want to be hitting her with a pie or anything like that. I have too much respect for her to do that." I think Mr. Lewis really did have a bit of a crush on my stepmother.

RV: So many interesting stories! Do you wish that your father's contributions were better known? That his works were better available?

ES: I do. Everybody knows who Norman Lear is. I mean, Norman became a household name. He is iconic. I don't think that there's anybody who does not know who Norman is. However, I don't think that there are many who know who my dad was any more. Everybody's gone. Most of his colleagues are gone, and people now, they don't know old TV shows or variety shows. A few might recognize his name because *The Carol Burnett Show* is still in perpetual reruns but, as for everything else he did, it's not available. I feel like people will forget, or have forgotten, who he was. That makes me sad because he made quite a contribution. I think he was brilliantly funny, and I hate to see that his era has been superseded by reality TV and all the other crap that's on. (laughs) I know the variety show is from a bygone era, people have tried to revive it and it tanks every time. It was a product of its time. But, you know, when the shows were good, they were so, so damn good.

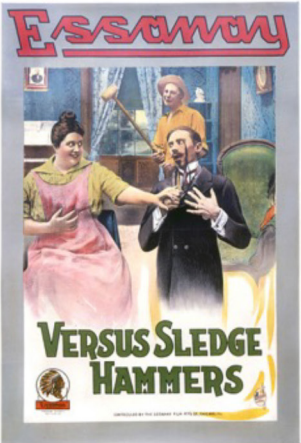
RV: Absolutely. And, you know, I think it's fair to say, that some of the most beloved things in the history of television and some of the careers of some of the biggest stars were largely in part to your dad, or your dad in conjunction with Norman.

ES: Could be. I mean, he touched a lot of lives.





A Night Out, 1915



Artifacts on Display



NILES

where reel history was made



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CHAPLIN DAYS

Interview with David Robinson, Film Intros, History, Locations

BRONCHO BILLY SILENT FILM FESTIVAL

Salute to Keystone Studio / Saving Brinton & More

New York & New Jersey Studios
Edison & Thanouser / Discovering a Great Train Robbery Location / Interview with Ned Thanouser / All about Vitagraph with Tony Susnick, Steve Massa and Sam Gill / Interview with Tracey Goessel, Film Preservation Society - she discusses the Biograph Project

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When Covid-19 is over, come and visit the Edison Theater in beautiful downtown Niles, home of the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum
37417 Niles Blvd., Fremont, CA 94536

You are invited to tour the museum, visit our store and watch a screening of film prints of classic silent films with live piano accompaniment.

Questions? Email preferred pr@nilesfilmmuseum.org or call (510) 494-1411



Niles (now part of Fremont) is in the SF Bay Area - the place where Charlie Chaplin shot The Tramp and four other films in 1915.

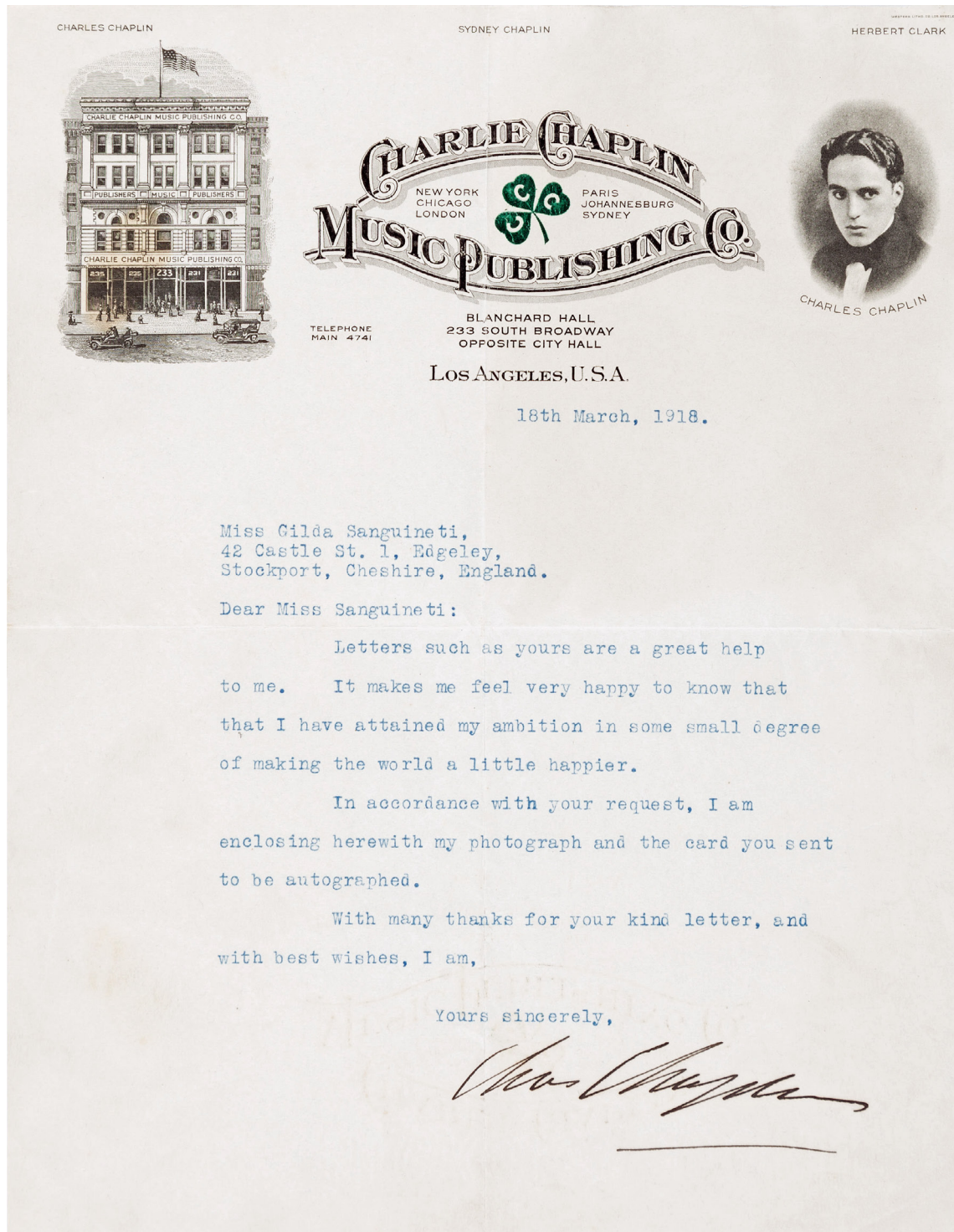
Become a member of the **Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum** and get discounts on all shows and get 10% off in our store for a whole year. Such a deal!
Individual memberships start at \$15 (Seniors / Students) and \$25 (Adult / Senior Couple)

www.nilesfilmmuseum.org

IN THEIR OWN WRITE

Letters from Hollywood — Charles Chaplin

This is an original letter from Chaplin's short-lived music publishing company. Chaplin himself said of the venture, "We printed two thousand copies of two very bad songs and musical compositions of mine — then we waited for customers. The enterprise was collegiate and quite mad. I think we sold three copies, two to pedestrians who happened to pass our office on their way downstairs."



KALTON C. LAHUE

A Pioneering Historian Remembered

By Tony Susnick

Growing up in the Midwest in the 1970s and having an interest in silent films was difficult. Every Friday night at 11 PM, my local PBS channel would show *The Silent Years*, so I could watch a full-length silent film and occasionally a short. That was my only access to silent films unless I saved my money to order from the Blackhawk Films catalogue.

But to delve deeper and learn more, I needed to find books on the subject. The nearest large bookstore was 25 miles away, so I had to make selections carefully when my parents took me on that infrequent trip. One of my first picks was Daniel Blum's *A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen* (I was only 8 – I was going to pick the book with the most photos). It contained literally thousands of photos of films I never knew existed.

During a later trip to the library, I found a couple of books by a man named Kalton C. Lahue. He wrote about the people I saw in Blum's photos. I never knew there was so much information about these individuals. Over the years, I would go to various libraries just to see what different Lahue books they might have. I could never find these books for sale in bookstores. I always wondered who this mystery man was who had so much information on so many actors and genres of the silent era.

Lahue wrote books in the 1960s and 70s about subjects in film history that no one had ever tackled before, such as silent film serials, actresses, obscure comedians, and film studios. Lahue gave them a place in history. Today, Lahue has reached an almost mythical status to those of us who love and study silent film. Little did I know that by the time I discovered him, his career in writing about film was already over.

Kalton Carroll Lahue was born in Rochford, Vermont, on October 4, 1934, to Kenneth Kalton Lahue and Florence DeMarco. According to the "about the author" biography in his books, Lahue became interested in motion pictures at an early age. He lived next door to the Park Theatre, where he worked as a projectionist and assistant manager. During the Korean War, he was sent overseas as a combat photographer. When he was discharged in 1955, he enrolled in the University of Vermont to study history.



Kalton, Kevin and Kory Lahue 1973

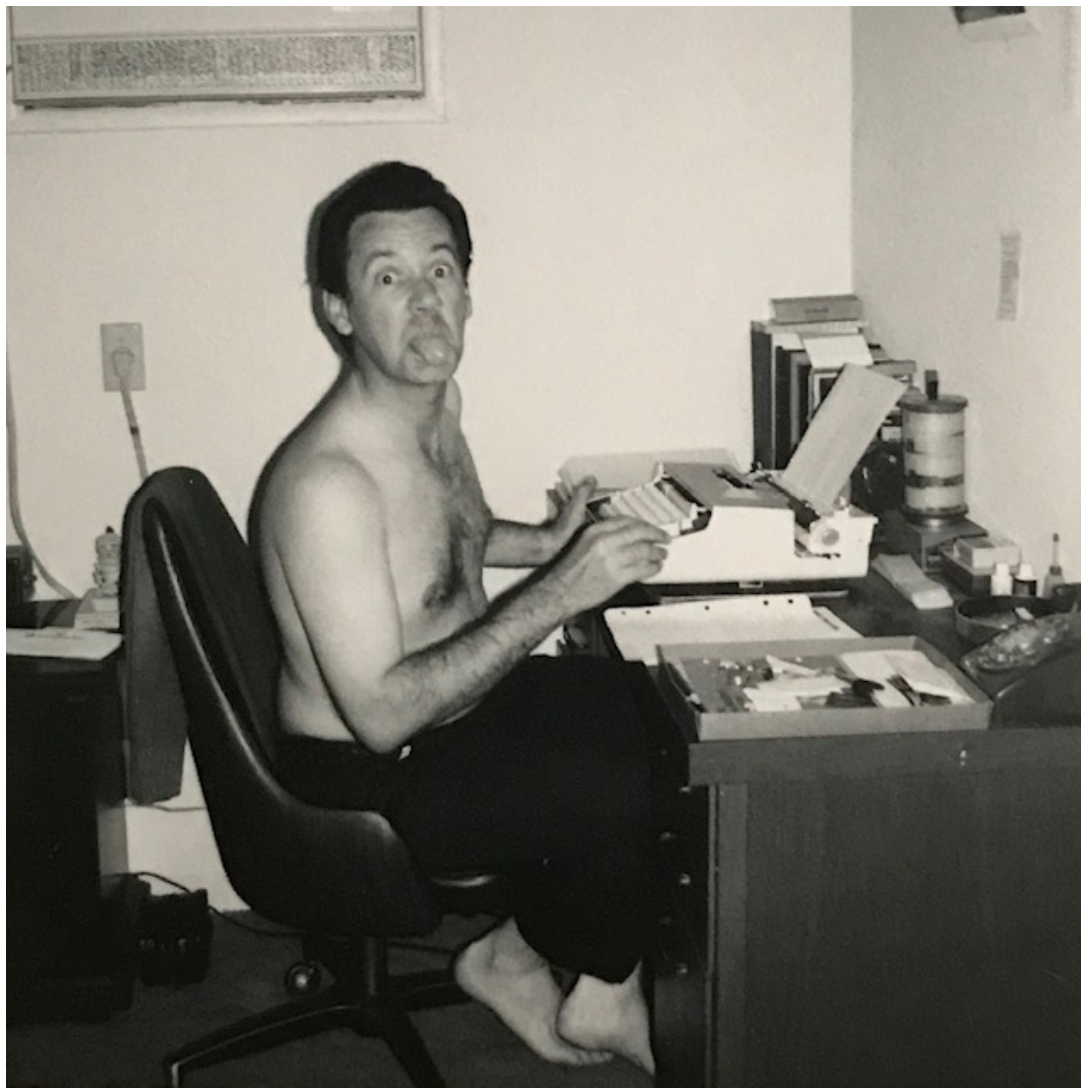
He earned an M.A. from San Jose State College and taught high school American History for a few years.

Lahue stated he "became interested in silent film for their historical value."

Sam Gill, retired archivist with the Motion Picture Academy of America, worked with Lahue on one of his more seminal works, *Clown Princes and Court Jesters*. Gill first heard of Lahue by reading his articles in the 8mm Collector. Gill said he could recognize Lahue's angle was different and

knew he had to be getting his information from first-hand sources and trade periodicals of the silent era. Gill wanted to start a column on the lesser-known comedians and wrote a piece on Larry Semon with a filmography. Lahue wrote to Gill, telling him how much he enjoyed the article and pointed out a few mistakes. (Gill had no access to the trades at that time.)

They decided to meet in person when Gill planned a trip to Hollywood, and they started sharing information. "He was interested in films between 1910-1930 and



Kalton Lahue at work, 1973

not particularly anything later or earlier,” Gill said. “Sometimes I would even write down things Kal told me after an in-person visit in Hollywood, which was almost always at our favorite hang-out, the Copper Skillet diner on the southwest corner of Sunset and Gower. The restaurant that is there now is still a place lots of us silent film comedy “nuts” meet at when in Hollywood, Richard Roberts nicknamed it the L-Ko Denny’s. He nicknamed it that because that site is where L-Ko (and later the Century Studio) was located until it burned down in 1926. In the days when Kal and I would go there, Billy West, the Charlie Chaplin imitator, operated the Columbia Grill located directly across the street on Gower, where Kal (and later I) had some great visits with Billy West himself.”

Lahue and Gill would share information with each other about people from the silent era that they were meeting and interviewing. They worked on *Clown Princes and Court Jesters* from the fall of 1967 through the fall of 1968.

“I went into the Army in October of 1968, so I had already completed my part of the book,” Gill said. “Kal then wrote captions for our pictures and sent off the manuscript to A. S. Barnes, who in the following

year, sent Kal the galleys for the book with the selection of pictures they chose from the total number we sent them. I told Kal to make sure they send back all the original photos because I had heard how some publishers would not do that. They did, though, which was a terrific relief to me because I did not have time to make copies of the originals before going off to Army Basic Training.”

The book itself was published in 1970, while Gill was still in the Army. “I received my copy of the book in Kansas while on leave,” Gill said. “That was a thrill. When I got out of the service in 1971 and returned to Los Angeles, Kal told me that the publisher decided not to do a second volume, which we had originally planned. We were going to write a second volume with 50 more of the lesser-known comedians and comedienne to

make a grand total of 100, but that didn’t happen. Kal went on with his own projects, and I went on with mine, which included school, and in 1972, a return to the Academy.”

Gill also got to know Lahue’s wife, Julie Sprasser. The couple had two children, Kevin and Kory, before divorcing in 1982. (Kalton and both of his sons have the initials KCL.) “We spent hours in the motion picture library on Wilshire going through motion picture magazines page by page,” Sprasser recalled. “Everything was bound. He was very methodical, and research was his big thing.” Lahue would give her certain things to look for, and that was her job. She said she remembers thinking to herself, “I’m in Hollywood, what am I doing stuck in a library?”

She remembers that the Motion Picture Country House was a frequent stop for interviews and admits that the co-author pen name “Terry Brewer” on the *Kops and Custards: The Legend of Keystone Films* is actually her.

One person she remembers well who was important to Lahue was the silent film actress and later screenwriter Betty Burbridge. “We would visit her little apartment,” Sprasser said. “She was a delightful person, and she would tell him stories about films and leads where to find certain people. I think he really thought he was going to make a living do-



Kalton and Kevin Lahue, 1973

ing this. Publishers would give him an advance, then you have to wait months and months till royalties come in, so he had to get another job. He was writing training programs for Westinghouse and then he got into writing Peterson Publishing and that was where he started making a living.”

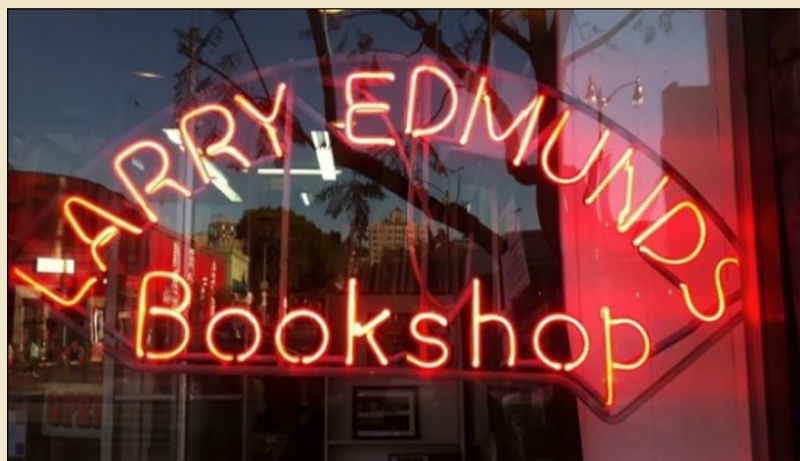
Kevin Lahue mostly remembers his father long after his silent film writing days. “We lived not far from the Silent Movie Theatre in Los Angeles, and I remember going there quite a bit as a kid,” he said. “Johnny and Dorothy Hampton, who owned the theatre, were good friends with my father and mother and would come over quite often for dinner and the holidays.” According to Sprasser, the Hamptons and Milt and Git Lubovski (who owned Larry Edmunds Bookshop) were the source of many of the photos that Lahue used in his books.



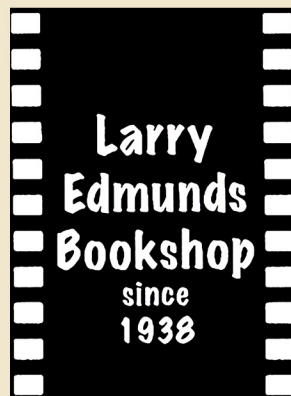
1984
In the 1970s until his death, Lahue became a prolific writer and turned to subjects where he could actually make a living. Many of the books were written for Peterson about everything from automotive repair to architectural photography. Lahue died in 1993 at the age of 59. “My father moved to Las Vegas in the 1990s, and he died there soon afterwards of an apparent heart attack,” Kevin Lahue said. “We had not heard from or were able to contact him for a couple of weeks, so we went there to check in and found that he had peacefully passed away. It was almost as if he knew that time was short and decided that’s where he wanted to be.” Sprasser said Lahue had just finished four automotive books and mailed them out on Friday before dying later that weekend.

The lone frustrating aspect for readers of some of Lahue’s books is that he supplies no footnotes or bibliography. If he mentions seeing a movie that we know is lost today, he does not mention where he saw it. But for a man who started with a blank slate and covered territory that no one else had ever covered, I am fully prepared to cut him some slack. Gill said even the late author and historian Bob Birchard told him Kalton Lahue and his books never got the recognition they deserved.

Lahue left future historians a legacy of accounts that would have been lost if not for his tireless efforts to tell the story of the major performers, as well as the bit players and studios. They still inspire and entertain the people who love and research silent film.



Save Larry Edmunds Bookshop!





THE HARDY FAMILY



By Paul E. Gierucki

On March 15, 1935, producer Hal Roach announced that the partnership of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, “one of the most famous comedy teams ever to appear on the screen,” was ending.

LAUREL-HARDY SPLIT ENDS COMEDY TEAM

West Coast Bureau of THE FILM DAILY
Hollywood—One of the most famous comedy teams ever to appear on the screen is coming to an end as a result of Stan Laurel of Laurel and Hardy pulling out of the Hal Roach fold because of inability to agree on stories. A new domestic series of shorts with Oliver Hardy, Patsy Kelly and Spanky MacFarland will replace the Laurel and Hardy series produced by Roach for M-G-M release.

Film Daily, March 16, 1935.

In the flurry of contradictory press statements which would follow, Roach claimed that Stan Laurel had “declined to continue under contract because they disagreed about screen story matters,” while Laurel placed the blame on Roach, saying, “It was so sudden that I’m not fully aware of the facts. We had some disagreement about stories but that had been ironed out. We were unable to agree on contract terms, but I was surprised at Roach’s announcement.” Subsequent articles even suggested that the rift originated between Stan and Babe themselves, prompting Oliver Hardy to send a telegram to Hollywood reporter Jimmy Starr addressing the false assertions:

PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE 1201.S

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

(47)

SIGNS

DL = Day Letter

NM = Night Message

NL = Night Letter

LCO = Deferred Cable

NLT = Cable Night Letter

WLT = Week-End Letter

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT J. C. WILLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

Received at 437 W. Pico St., Los Angeles, Calif. Telephone TRinity 4321 Sta. 26

SA23 49 XC=DELMONTE CALIF 16 822A

JIMMY STARR=

LOSANGELES HERALD AND EXPRESS=

STAN LEAVING STUDIO WAS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STUDIO AND

HE WE HAVE NEVER HAD ANY TROUBLE AT ANY TIME AND AS YOU

KNOW HE HAS HAD COMPLETE CHARGE OF ALL STORIES AND FROM

THE PAST RESULTS WHY SHOULD ANYONE INTERFERE SOMEONE GAVE

OUT THE WRONG INFORMATION WOULD APPRECIATE CORRECTION

REGARDS=

OLIVER HARDY.

MINUTES IN TRANSIT

FULL-RATE	DAY LETTER
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WESTERN UNION MESSENGERS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE DELIVERY OF NOTES AND PACKAGES

Regardless of the reason, Laurel's departure left the studio with only one half of its most popular (and most profitable) comedy duo.

In place of the Laurel and Hardy comedies, Roach announced that he would instead produce a new series, under the general title of *The Hardys* or *The Hardy Family*, which would star studio favorites Oliver Hardy, Patsy Kelly, and six-year-old George "Spanky" McFarland.

The truth behind Roach's split with Laurel, and the motivation for floating a new Hardy series, seems to lie somewhere in the middle of both accounts.

Noted author and historian Randy Skretvedt provided critical production details in the revised Ultimate Edition of his masterwork, *Laurel and Hardy: The Magic Behind the Movies*, from Bonaventure Press. He confirms that Laurel and Roach had indeed been quarreling over Roach's proposed story material for a film which would ultimately become *Bonnie Scotland* (1935). In Skretvedt's words, "Hal Roach's enthusiasm for his new pet idea was matched by Stan Laurel's dislike of it, and arguments ensued."

This was not the first time that Stan and Hal had argued. In fact, their battle just one year earlier during the production of *Babes in Toyland* (1934) is the stuff of legend. Still, another round of "story troubles" hardly seems reason enough to terminate an agreement with one of the studio's greatest assets. It would have been a contributing factor to the split, perhaps, but certainly not the lone cause. A more likely reason lies within Stan's claim of a contract squabble, which is also borne out by surviving documentation.

A typewritten letter dated March 18th, 1935, on Stan Laurel Productions letterhead, indicates that there was in fact some serious trouble brewing prior to Roach's announcement:

STAN LAUREL
PRODUCTIONS

10353 Glenbarr Ave.,
Palms Post Office,
Los Angeles, Calif.

March 18, 1935

Hal Roach Studios, Inc.,
Culver City, California.

Dear Sirs:

Answering yours of the fourteenth
instant.

I, at no time agreed the contract
be terminated forthwith. Your statement,
you have not been able to secure my coopera-
tion is pure fabrication and subterfuge.

I am still under contract with you,
and I am prepared to continue under contract
to expiration date.

Yours truly,

Stan Laurel

SL/EM

Archivist Bernie Hogya provides additional insight, via his indispensable LettersFromStan.com website, regarding Laurel's mindset during that period:

"In the midst of mounting marital problems at the onset of 1935, Stan's contract at Roach was about to expire, and he didn't care for the new provisions the studio wished to incorporate into their agreement. Roach insisted on including a morals clause—perhaps not unreasonably, given the amount of time and negative publicity generated by Stan's very public marital difficulties."

It appears that Roach, unhappy with Laurel's continuing complaints about his "unsuitable" story suggestions, may have used the disagreement as leverage during their contract renegotiations.

On March 28, 1935, the studio upped the ante by releasing another news story with a paste-up press photo featuring Hardy, Kelly, and McFarland, promoting the Hardy Family series:



The original snipe on the reverse reads:

OLIVER HARDY AND NEW FILM TEAM MATES HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

Meet the Hardy family —

Ollie, Patsy, and “Spanky.” They are Hal Roach’s newest comedy team — and each of the trio is a screen star in his own right. Rotund Oliver Hardy, who recently split with his film pal of many reels, Stan Laurel, will play the father in a series of domestic fun films. The remaining roles will be played by Patsy Kelly and “Spanky” McFarland. What sad-pan Laurel plans for his film future is unknown, according to Roach.

Photo shows: Top, Hardy; Center, Miss Kelly, and “Spanky.”
3-28-35

If the story was indeed designed to force Laurel's hand, the gambit may have worked. On April 1st, just four days later, a Los Angeles Times story by Edwin Schallert speculated that Laurel could return to the fold:

Comedians' Reunion Considered Probable

I have a hunch that Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel will be reunited in the near future.

News of a break-up between two comedians is always intriguing as news, but the usual outcome is that members of a team don't remain permanently separated. Consider, for instance, all the troubles of Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey of a few years ago.

One thing that may urge the Laurel and Hardy reunion along is the postponing of the first of the "Hardy Family" series of pictures. Patsy Kelly can't appear with Oliver, the "Babe," at the present time, because of being borrowed at Warner Brothers. She will be retained there for about three weeks.

Meanwhile, at Hal Roach's an "Our Gang" comedy will get under way as a filler-in.

Then, on April 4th, 1935, it was officially announced that Messrs. Laurel and Hardy were "reuniting":

HOLLYWOOD, April 4 (AP).—The movie team of Laurel and Hardy was back in the flickers today. Stan Laurel, who had "story trouble" with Hal Roach, producer of the comedians' pictures, patched up the difficulties today and signed a new contract. Oliver Hardy, his teammate, was all smiles as Laurel, who writes the "gags" for their films, emerged from Roach's office with the announcement they were to go to work at once on a picture.

The May 1936 edition of *The Hal Roach Funnies*, the Roach Studios' newsletter, went to great lengths to illustrate that the stalemate was over and everyone was ready to get back to work:



HAL ROACH'S FUNNIES

PUBLISHED EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE IN A
SPIRIT OF FUN

Office of Publication
HAL ROACH STUDIOS, INC.
Culver City, California

SAM W. B. COHN Editor

RE: LAUREL & HARDY

If anyone needed to be convinced of the fact that the world-wide popularity of the team of Laurel and Hardy is continuing on the upgrade he should peruse the stacks of letters, telegrams and cablegrams that deluged the Hal Roach studios following the announcement that the famous duo had split. Senders of these messages were unanimous in decrying the parting of the comics and termed such a move a catastrophe. Exhibitors, critics, fans and others were one in imploring both the studio and Mr. Laurel to "patch up your trouble" and when the word went out a few weeks ago that this had been done, another deluge of mail and wires brought congratulations and thanks from young and old in all corners of the globe.



MR. LAUREL

Now that the stellar funsters are "together again" and are in production on what they sincerely believe will be their finest and funniest full-length feature, everybody is happy and jubilant. For seven years Laurel and Hardy have brought joy and laughter to countless thousands of motion picture theatre-goers throughout the civilized world and if we may judge by the sentiment expressed by their ardent followers, it is the hope of all that they shall continue for many, many more years to carry on as they have done in the past.



MR. HARDY

Screen Amateurs Get 'Break'

Two comedy screen shorts featuring amateur performers, one to be filmed in New York and the other at the Hal Roach studios in Culver City, Calif., will be produced by Hal Roach during the ensuing thirty days. This announcement, emanating from the producer's New York offices, follows closely upon the release of an "Our Gang" comedy, "Beginner's Luck," which was based on a similar idea and which met with country-wide success. The comedy to be made in the Eastern studios is already underway while arrangements are now being concluded for the filming of the fun film to be produced on the coast. Both pictures will have tie-ups with a radio station, newspapers and theatres, assuring national exploitation for the releases. Besides being presented with movie contracts, winners of the contests to be held to select talent, will receive substantial cash prizes hung up by Roach.

HAL ROACH'S FUNNIES

Speaking of Miss Patsy Kelly

In the less than two years that Patsy Kelly has been a member of the movie colony, she has accomplished what it has taken many other screen stars nearly a decade to attain. The hoydenish colleen, who gained Broadway stage recognition through her twinkling feet and acclaim as a truly great tap dancer, created a new vogue for herself and a definite place in the cinema sun when she reluctantly "went Hollywood," laid aside her dancing slippers and just acted natural in front of the whirling cameras. This startling reversal in a professional career is unparalleled.

Critics are today acclaiming La Kelly as the foremost comedienne—bar none—on the screen. The two series of comedy shorts she has appeared in with Thelma Todd served to but whet the appetite of fans for more of this unusual personality. Hal Roach, who, in 1933, induced Patsy to forget the stage in favor of the studios, once again demonstrated that he is an astute talent scout and a maker of stars, as well as an outstanding motion picture producer. Today the services of "The Kelly," as the raven-haired comedienne chooses to refer to herself, are in demand at all major studios and to date she has been featured in seven full length productions as well as in the two series of comedy shorts. It does not call for an astronomer to prophesy that "Patsy" will be the name of a shining star in the movie constellation during the season 1935-'36.

Hoot Mon! Finlayson Returns

When Jimmie Finlayson, eccentric Scotch comedian, arrived in Los Angeles from New York a few days ago, he was greeted at the airport by Laurel and Hardy and a bagpipe band. The veteran funster has been cast for a principal supporting role in the forthcoming Laurel and Hardy full length feature and was brought over from England by Hal Roach especially for this role. Incidentally, the part that Finlayson will play is that of a hard-boiled Scotch sergeant-major.

Polly Parrott's Screen Debut

Polly Parrott, eighteen year old daughter of Charley Chase, the Hal Roach comedian, made her screen debut recently in "Okay Toots!" in which her daddy was starred. The attractive youngster has long cherished a desire to don grease paint and follow in her famous father's footsteps but was not permitted to do so until she had finished her schooling.

Where Credit Is Due

Contributing many of the humorous captions for the pictures appearing in the center spread "Roachagravure" section of this publication were W. W. Scott, former staff associate of the magazines "Life" and "Ballyhoo" and Johnny Guedel, well known gag man and writer.

There's Gold In Them Thar Kids!

Hal Roach's "Our Gang" kid unit will shortly celebrate the fifteenth year of its existence. Since the inception of this band of little "rascals," more than one hundred youngsters have been a part of it and at least twenty of this number were given a start on the road to fame and fortune as a direct result of this association.

Today the "Gang" has regained the prestige that it once enjoyed and the present group of kiddies that comprise the unit rank with the original organization in world-wide popularity. This fact is attested to by their fan mail which now exceeds all previous records. Such pictures as "Mike Fright," "Shrimps For A Day," "Beginner's Luck" and "Sprucin' Up," were an important factor in bringing the "Gang" back to its deserved niche. Likewise, rave reviews and editorials praising the work of this unit have had a part in calling attention to the group of juvenile screen players.

MGM is helping exhibitors to cash in on the new popularity of "Our Gang" in a big way. All manner of exploitation aids and publicity is being contrived by the sales department to further stimulate interest in the group. One of the outstanding promotional stunts now being undertaken is the organization of "Our Gang" baseball teams in more than one thousand cities and towns throughout the United States. Then there are several other ideas for the exploitation of the unit that are being held in reserve for the "big push" which will shortly be launched. Forward looking exhibitors will do well to contract for this series of shorts now if they have not already done so.

Chase Comes Thru

"Southern Exposure" is the title of Charley Chase's latest Hal Roach-MGM fun film. And, speaking of this popular comedian, have you screened his previous two or three pictures? If not, don't fail to do so as you will surely want to give these hilarious situation comedies early play dates.

Screen Oddity

For the first time in her screen career Evelyn Venable appears in modern dress in the Hal Roach-MGM feature comedy drama, "Vagabond Lady." All of her previous productions have been of the costume variety.

Search For Title

It won't be "McLaurel and McHardy" nor "Laurel and Hardy of India." We refer, of course, to the title of the new Laurel and Hardy full-length feature comedy which goes into production at the Hal Roach studios this week. Both of the above names were announced as tentative titles of the fun opus during recent months but the comics have decided that neither one is appropriate to the story. Studio brains are now being cudgled for a fitting "handle" for the picture which will deal with the adventures of Laurel and Hardy as bewildered privates in a Scottish regiment on foreign duty.

HAVE YOU ORGANIZED AN "OUR GANG" BASEBALL TEAM IN YOUR TOWN? SEE YOUR MGM EXCHANGE AT ONCE IF YOU DESIRE TO CASH IN ON A REAL EXPLOITATION STUNT!

TOGETHER AGAIN!

and rarin' to go



Ollie, Hal and Stan wear smiles that won't come off as a result of the happy reunion.



一枝煙槍一燈罩一舉一動惹人笑

The Chinese "Laurel & Hardy": This team of Orientals is famous throughout the Orient for their clever impersonation of the stellar Hal Roach-MGM comedy duo.



A Hardy Lad Who Seeks Screen Laurels is Harold Cordes, 15 years of age, who recently won first place in a "screen star doubles" contest held in Los Angeles.



"Left: "Spanky" McFarland, chubby "hero" of "Our Gang," offers his services as understudy to Oliver Hardy. Some make-up, eh what!



Right: The "boys" inspect a reel of tests of themselves in the characters they will portray in their forthcoming feature production.





In all, the Roach-Laurel contract standoff lasted just twenty-one days, and a split with Oliver Hardy was narrowly averted.

But what of the Hardy Family?

It had been assumed for many years that the proposed Hardy Family series was little more than a bluff. Historians theorized that Roach would never have pursued the project as it would have effectively removed key players from two other successful series, Patsy from the Thelma Todd and Patsy Kelly shorts and Spanky from the Our Gang comedies. However, the discovery of an original 43-page dialogue script, dated March 30th, 1935, proves conclusively that the studio was quite serious about moving forward with the new series if Laurel failed to extend his agreement.

Following, for the first time, is a reproduction of the complete script as it was discovered by the author some fifteen years ago. Untitled here, save for the designation “E-4” and a “#10” notation in pencil, Randy Skretvedt indicates that the working title was *Their Night Out*.

10

E-4

1.

FADE IN -

Closeup of motto:
"HOME SWEET HOME"
framed on dining room
wall of bungalow.

SOUND: Background music, "Home
Sweet Home."

CAMERA PANS to swinging
kitchen door as we hear:

PATSY'S VOICE: Lover, dear, you'd better
help mother!

Patsy appears at the
kitchen door and looks off.

PATSY: Didn't you hear me
calling?

Closeup of Book,
"Anthony Adverse."

PATSY'S VOICE: Why didn't you answer
your mother?

The book comes down,
showing a closeup of
Spanky.

SPANKY:- I think this book is a
lot of hocey! It ain't
got no pictures.

LONGER SHOT - Patsy
enters to Spanky.

PATSY: You're too young to
understand it. It's
your father's favorite
book.

SPANKY: Oh, Pa's funny - he
likes spinach too.

PATSY: Never mind. You must
help mother set the
table. This is picture
night.

SPANKY: Oh boy!

He gets a chair and starts
for the plate closet.
Patsy tells him to be
careful, and exits to the
kitchen, as something is
boiling over.

Spanky stands on tiptoe
and barely reaches a
big pile of plates -
finally gets hold of the
top one.

RECEIVED
MAR 30 1935

The plates tilt and the whole bunch slide onto the floor with a crash - Spanky covering his head with both hands to protect himself. Patsy rushes in, and Spanky alibis by saying she had them too near the door.

PATSY: Never mind. Help me clean them up so your father won't see them. He'll lose his temper and we won't go to the show.

They start to gather up the broken dishes.

Introduce Babe in a new open Ford or Chevrolet, singing "In The Valley Yoo Hoo." He stops long enough to greet the neighbors, who are all very pleasant to him - everything lovely and happy.

He turns into his driveway at side of lawn and we see the revolving sprinkler wetting his car. He gives the auto horn the Hardy touch.

INT. LIVING ROOM -
Spanky is looking out the window as Patsy opens the kitchen door.

PATSY: There's Dad, son. Go and meet him and tell him to hurry in - dinner's all ready.

SPANKY: Hot dog!

He rushes out.

EXTERIOR -
Spanky rushes in to Babe's setup.

SPANKY: Howdy, Dad. Some bus!

BABE: Hello, little man.

SPANKY: Hey, pop - what you got for me tonight?

Babe gets out of the car,
makes Spanky shut his
eyes, and comes forth
with a pair of skates.
Spanky takes it big and
rushes to put them on.

Babe, pleased with himself,
goes to exit but sees the
sprinkler is wetting his
car a little. He calls
to Spanky:

BABE: Turn the water off for
your daddy!

Spanky leaves the skates
and instead of turning
off the water he kinks
the hose. As Babe goes
to move the sprinkler,
Spanky releases it and
showers Babe. Spanky
laughs, and Babe burns up
and starts after him, as
a stream of water starts
into the car.

Spanky runs up the stairs,
and as Babe starts to
follow him he steps on
the skate and does a 108,
nearly breaking his neck.

Patsy appears at the door -
Spanky behind her - and
gives Babe the devil as
the dinner is getting cold.
She then re-enters the
house.

SPANKY: Better out out the playing,
Pop. Mama's sore.

He gives his father the
Hardy nod. Babe takes
it, then enters the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM.
Spanky is climbing into
a chair as Babe enters,
sore.

BABE: Where's your mother?

Spanky nods towards the
kitchen.

As Babe goes to enter
the kitchen, Patsy comes
out with a plate of food
and the door bumps Babe.

PATSY: Why don't you be careful?

She crosses to the table and sets the dinner down.

PATSY: Hurry up! The dinner won't be fit to eat.

Babe comes to the table, gives the kid a dirty look and takes his seat, forgetting to remove his hat. Spanky gives him the office about the hat, and Babe looks behind him. The kid again motions about the hat, but Babe doesn't get it.

SPANKY: Pop, there's ladies present.

PATSY: It doesn't matter, son. I'm only his wife.

Babe gets embarrassed and removes his hat. Spanky grins at his father's discomfort. Babe starts to make a pass at him and Spanky yells his head off. Patsy looks up.

PATSY: Will you stop picking on our son? You have him so scared now he's afraid to open his mouth!

Babe takes this. She goes to serve the spaghetti. Spanky holds out his plate and receives it. Patsy gathers up a lot more and looks over at Babe.

PATSY: Well?

Babe passes his plate as Patsy reaches forward with the spaghetti, and it goes on the table instead.

PATSY: Of all the clumsy things!

She crosses around to clean up the mess, and in doing so steps on Babe's hat. She hands it to him and pans him for putting it on the floor.



Spanky takes the hat from Babe and fixes it.

SPANKY: Just as good as new, Pop.

He shows it to Babe, who thanks him. Spanky then places the hat on the floor beside his chair.

Patsy crosses around and serves Babe.

PATSY: Come on, hurry up. We'll be late for the first show.

Spanky starts to eat. Babe stops him and they bow their heads as Babe says grace. At the finish:

BABE: Amen.

PATSY: Amen.

SPANKY: Okay!

Babe burns up as the others start to eat.

BABE: My dear, I have tried not to interfere in your raising of our son, but the time has come when I must definitely call a halt.

Spanky, eating spaghetti, has a long piece hanging down, which he sucks up into his mouth. Babe takes this, then continues:

BABE: There comes a time in every child's life when a firm hand should guide him!

The kid is paying no attention to his father. At this point he sucks up another long string of spaghetti.

PATSY: That's no way to eat! Watch your father.

The kid looks at her in surprise.

Babe explains about the eating, and demonstrates the proper way to do it. He winds the spaghetti on his fork with the end of a spoon and daintily puts it in his mouth.

Unfortunately, a long piece hangs down, and to get rid of it Babe sucks it up into his mouth. Spanky looks up too late to catch Babe. Babe repeats and this time Spanky catches him.

SPANKY: I did that!

PATSY: (Disgusted)
Like father - like son!
You're alike as two nuts!

Babe burns up and looks at Spanky, who does an imitation of Babe getting embarrassed.

BABE: Oh, what's the use? I'm never right

SPANKY: Right!

Babe glares at him and continues:

BABE: I've never won an argument yet.

PATSY: And you never will as long as I'm conscious.
So what?

They glare at each other and it looks like a fight.

SPANKY: (Disgusted)
Oh, cut it out folks.
I hate a scene.

BABE: Keep still and eat your dinner.

Spanky shows him his empty plate and Babe does a takem.

BABE: Did you eat all that?

SPANKY: Sure. I kept my mind on my work while you two were gabbing. I ain't going to miss that picture show.

PATSY: That's right. We'll never get a seat.
(She starts up)

BABE: Aren't you going to finish your dinner?

PATSY: No. I'd rather see Clark Gable than eat any time.

She goes into bedroom
to get her things on,
and Babe follows her to
the door.

BABE: We're not going to see that
Shiek again. We're going
to see Jean Harlow!

PATSY'S
VOICE: Stop arguing and get your
hat. We're going to see
Gable!

Babe pouts - sore as
the devil. He goes
over and glares at
Spanky.

SPANKY: Don't glare at me, Pop.
I don't care where we go -
they all run a cartoon.

Patsy comes from the
bedroom with hat and
wrap on.

PATSY: Come, darling.

SPANKY: Righto, Ma!

He runs to a chair and
climbs up on it to
reach his cap, which is
on top of the bird cage.
He gets the cap, and as
an afterthought steals
the lump of sugar that
is stuck in the wires of
the cage - eats it and
jumps down.

SPANKY: Come on, Pop. Don't be
a killjoy!

PATSY: Oh, never mind him. We
know the way.

BABE: I'll go - -

He starts to look for
his hat, and picks it
off the floor -

BABE: (Defiantly)
But we're going to
see Harlow!

He gives the Hardy nod
and puts on his hat. He
takes it with a frown,
removes the hat and we see
his head covered with
spaghetti. He burns.

Flash of the dog doing a
takedown, jumping down and
eating the spaghetti.

Patsy gives a grunt of disgust, grabs Spanky by the hand and pulls him out of the room as Babe takes a grip on the tablecloth and yanks it off the table to clean up.

EXTERIOR OF HOUSE -
Patsy comes out with Spanky in a hurry - sees the hose pouring water into the car and tells Spanky to turn it off quick before his father sees it. Spanky does so and Patsy throws the sprinkler away from the car, then turns and pans Babe for not hurrying.

Babe comes from the house and starts into the car.

PATSY: That's right! Don't give your family a thought! Before we were married you used to help me into the car. Now you hope I break my neck!

Babe pouts - goes to the rear door - opens it and is covered by a deluge of water.

BABE: (Burning)
Well, there goes the picture show!

PATSY: You're not going to let a little thing like that stop you? Your clothes will dry.

She helps Spanky into the back seat and Babe gets in the front. They start an argument as they back out of the driveway. FADE OUT.

FADE IN - EXTERIOR
~~STREET~~ - Traveling shot - Babe driving, with Patsy and Spanky in the back seat.

PATSY: We never go out, and when we do you make such a fuss about it, there isn't any pleasure in going!



Babe is burning up and mumbling to himself. Patsy notices this after Spanky calls her attention to it.

PATSY: What are you mumbling about? It must be terrible or you'd speak out.

BABE: I never said a word.

PATSY: Well, it wouldn't do you any good if you did!

BABE: (Turning around*
Another peep out of you
and we'll go home!

PATSY: Don't make me laugh!

Patsy and Spanky look off ahead and both take it big.

Shoot over Babe - traveling shot on street. He is headed for another car. Patsy's scream comes over scene as he gives the wheel a twist and barely escapes.

Traveling shot - Babe in foreground. Patsy and Spanky unwind:

SPANKY: Hey, Pop, cut it out! That was too close!

BABE: It's your mother's fault - trying my patience in heavy traffic!

PATSY: That's right - blame it on me! I never opened my mouth till you nearly wrecked us!

Babe raises his eyes to high heaven, when out of a clear sky Spanky agrees with him.

SPANKY: You sure did, Mom. I heard you.

Patsy takes this.

BABE: Thank you, Spanky.

SPANKY: Okay, Pop.

Babe turns back and grins with pleasure.

CLOSE SHOT -
Spanky and Patsy. She
turns and glares at him.

SPANKY: (Whispering)
Aw, forget it, mumsy -
I'm bulling him. I want
to see that show.

She pats his head and
looks front, glaring at
Babe out of scene. Spanky
takes a siren whistle out
of his pocket and gives a
loud blast on it. Patsy
motions him to be quiet,
but he takes another blast
at it. It sounds like a
siren on a police car.

CLOSE SHOT - Babe in fore-
ground. He takes the whistle
and gets a little nervous.
On the second blast he
takes it and pulls over
to the curb.

STANDING SHOT -
Babe pulls up to the curb
and puts on the brake.

PATSY: What now?

BABE: I'm merely obeying the law.
You heard it.

PATSY: Heard what?

BABE: That siren. It's either the
police or the fire depart-
ment, and the law is
strict. On hearing the
sound of the siren, the
traveling public going in
either direction will
proceed in an orderly
manner to the nearest curb - .

PATSY: (Interrupting)
Why, you nit-wit, that
was Spanky playing!

Babe turns around and
looks at Spanky, who
gives him a blast on the
whistle. Babe flies into
a tantrum and snatches
the whistle away. Spanky
breaks into a wail and
Patsy snatches the
whistle back from Babe
and gives it to Spanky.
They get into a squabble
and a few people gather.

11.

PATSY: Well, do we see the show
or not?

BABE: (Noticing the people)
Certainly, my dear.

He throws the car into
gear and starts out, as
the people laugh and
continue on their way.

TRAVELING SHOT -
Babe in foreground. He
and Patsy are both sore.
Spanky looks at them and
shakes his head:

SPANKY: Why don't you two try
and get along?

BOTH: (Snapping at him)
SHUT UP!

Spanky takes it and
holds his hand over
his mouth.

PATSY: (To Babe)
Why don't you step on it?

BABE: Because, my dear, there
happens to be a truck in
the way.

PATSY: Well, give him the horn!

SPANKY: Pop never thought of that.

Babe taps the horn.

Shoot over Babe and show
a large truck in front of
him. We hear the horn.

Flash of the roughneck
driver on the truck. He
hears the horn and sneers.

Flash of Babe's car.
Spanky is standing against
the front seat - Patsy
is up motioning, and Babe
is tooting the horn.

CLOSE SHOT - Babe and
Spanky. Patsy is giving
Babe hell because he
doesn't go around the truck.
Spanky gives a big blast
on the siren, and we see
the truck moving out of
the way immediately.

12.

BABE: Very good, my boy. At last
you're using my brains.
Now we'll make time.

Flash of the truck driver
glaring after them in
disgust.

A few flashes of the car
going through traffic -
Spanky clearing the way
by blowing the siren.

Traveling shot - Back of
Babe and Spanky. They
are pulling up on a
closed car.

BABE: Give them the whistle, son.

Spanky blows on the
whistle. Nothing doing.

BABE: Oh, you haven't got wind
enough. Give it to me.

He takes the whistle and
gives it a terrific
blast. We see a police-
man's head come out of
the car.

Babe reacts and Patsy
nearly dies.

SPANKY: Now you've done it, Pop!

COP'S
VOICE: Pull over!

STANDING SHOT. The cops
are just getting out of
their car as Babe comes
to a stop at the curb.
The cops advance on them.

CLOSE SHOT - Group.
The cop glares at Babe:

COP: Ah, wise guy, hey? A
traffic beater. One of
those get-there-at-all-
cost guys!

BABE: (Very polite)
Officer, I'm sure I can
explain to your satis-
faction. You see - -



13.

COP: I don't see nothin' but I
heard plenty, and you'll
be charged with plenty!
Weaving - unnecessary
sounding of horn - imper-
sonating an officer - and - -

2nd COP: Speeding!

1st COP: Speeding is right! This
will cost you plenty!

PATSY: Now see here, officer, can't
you overlook it this time?
He wouldn't have done it
if he was sober.
(All take this)

COP: Ah, that accounts for it!
Give me a whiff.

Both officers lean
forward. Babe, em-
barrassed, blows out
his breath. The cops
take it.

COP: Bootleg!

2nd COP: That's garlic or I'm an
Indian.

SPANKY: Right! My mother cooked
spaghetti.

COP: Gee, I love spaghetti.

PATSY: Is that so? Well, why
don't you drop in some
time and let me fix you
some?

The cop joins Patsy
and they start a
discussion. Babe and
Spanky burn.

CLOSEUP - Spanky and
Babe.

SPANKY: Hey Pop, are you going to
stand for that?

BABE: Certainly not!

LONGER SHOT - Babe
gets indignant.

BABE: Now see here, officer, I
demand you do your duty.
Give me a ticket if you must
but leave personalities
out of it!

Babe starts to search
for it as Spanky
butts in:

COP: (Taking out his book)
Where's your operator's
license?

SPANKY: And make him give me back
my whistle.

COP: Was it your whistle, sonny
boy?

SPANKY: Sure, but Pop took it from
me.

COP: (To Babe)
Why, you big lunk! It's
fathers like you that make
children leave home!

PATSY: That's what I told him.

BABE: (Tries to alibi)
I merely tried to keep him
from blowing it. You see,
it sounds like a siren.

COP: (Grabbing whistle)
Oh, I know - you're the
type that don't want anyone
to have a good time.
(Gives whistle to Spanky)
Here you are, son. Blow
it all you want to. I'm
a father and I understand.

Spanky shakes hands
with the cop and they
give Babe a dirty look.

COP: We're letting you off for
your son's sake, but watch
your step!

The cops start for
their car.

CLOSEUP - Babe and
Spanky. Patsy is
background.

PATSY: Gee, you're a lucky stiff.
If we hadn't been with you
they'd have thrown you in
and lost the key.

Spanky gives a blast on
the whistle. Babe and
Patsy take it and look
off, scared. Babe goes to
take the whistle and
Spanky yells. The cops
look as though they were
coming back.

CLOSE SHOT -
The cops wave off at
Spanky and enter their
car.

CLOSE - GROUP in Babe's
car. Spanky waves off
to the cops.

PATSY: Get going - I want to see
Gable!

BABE: (Starting the car)
Gable nothing - we're going
to see the Harlow picture.
That's final!

PATSY: We'll see Gable or nothing.

Babe burns and makes
a decision:

BABE: You've run this family
long enough. I'm going to
show you once and for all
who's boss. We're going
to see Harlow! Harlow!
Harlow!

He looks at Spanky,
and both give the Hardy
nod. Babe throws the
car into gear and it
jumps out of scene.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN on Billing
over theatre, where we
see Clark Gable's name
in large letters.

PAN DOWN and we discover
the car in front of a
neighborhood theatre.
Box office in center
and billing of Gable
very much in evidence.
There is a big line at
the ticket window.

Babe is resting his head
on the wheel in an
attitude of disgust.

PATSY: Why didn't you go into
the parking lot?

16.

BABE: Because I refuse to be gyped. I am a tax payer - the streets are free. Why should I pay twenty five cents to those robbers?

PATSY: Suit yourself. But I'll get out and get the tickets. Don't forget where you left us.

She and Spanky get out and Babe starts the car as he sees a car pulling away from the curb.

EXTERIOR - Curb. A car is just pulling away as Babe drives in. He pulls up alongside a machine so he can back into the parking space. Babe starts to back in, but a cut down Ford with high school kids beats him into it. Babe backs in and bumps the Ford, and there is an argument.

EXT. THEATRE -
Patsy and Spanky in line.

SPANKY: Hey Mom, Pop's in a jam.

PATSY: Shhh! If you want to see the show, keep still.

EXT. AT CURB.
Babe in car. The cop of previous meeting is telling him to beat it.

BABE: But, officer, I tell you I had the right of way.

COP: (Gets tough)
And the young folks have the parking space. So what?

BABE: (Scared and embarrassed)
Oh, it is of slight importance. I shall move on to another parking site.

He throws the car in gear and exits. The cop joins his partner, while the high school kids beat it towards the show.



Flash of Patsy getting up to the window, with Spanky looking off anxiously for Babe.

EXTERIOR AT CURB.
A woman is standing at the curb as Babe drives up.

BABE: Pardon me, Madam, is this space reserved for anyone in particular?

WOMAN: No, I guess you can have it.

BABE: Thank you. Thank you very much.

He pulls up ahead so he can back in.

Change angles - woman in foreground. We see she is standing in front of a fire plug, as Babe backs the car in and gets out.

BABE: I'm very lucky to have found a space adjacent to the theatre - -

WOMAN: (Freezing up)
Please! I don't know you - how dare you address me?

BABE: Oh, Madam, you misunderstand. I was merely trying -

A big roughneck character enters and stands beside Babe. The woman, relieved, rushes over to him.

WOMAN: Oh Henry dear, I'm glad you're here.

MAN: Did he insult you?

SOMAN: He looked like he was going to. I don't like his looks.

MAN: Neither do I!
(To Babe:
For two pins I'd bust you one!

The woman pulls him away to avoid a scene, and Babe is greatly relieved. He starts to leave and discovers the fire plug, just as the same cops in their car drive up and stop. Babe takes it big and climbs into his car. The cops glare at him.

COP: You again, huh? What's the big idea?

BABE: I was just leaving, Officer.

He gets all embarrassed and starts out.

COP: We'd better keep our eyes on that bird - he's acting nutty.

EXTERIOR THEATRE.
Patsy is almost up to the window, looking around anxiously. Spanky enters to her.

SPANKY: No go, Ma. He ain't no place in sight.

PATSY: The big lunk! He forgot to give me any money.

SPANKY: Well stall, Ma - stall.

EXT. PARKING PLACE -
Big sign, "Parking 25¢"
Babe drives in.

CLOSE SHOT on Babe's car as the attendant comes over to it.

ATTEND: All right, mister - I'll park it.

BABE: You'll do nothing of the kind! I'll park it myself. I know you fender-busters!

ATTEND: (A little sore)
Back it in there - close to the other one.

Babe starts to do so.

Change angles. A man
(type like Tiny Sanford)
with wife and kid are
just getting out of their
car. They look off and
do a taken. The woman
screams and they all
dash for their lives
back into their car as
Babe backs in with a
tremendous rush - crashes
the man's door off and
bumps into the back fence.
An argument starts between
the family and Babe -
they are bawling him out
for being so careless.

Flash of Patsy just
getting to the ticket
window. She is worried
and starts to question the
girl about the show,
stalling for time. The
people in line are
getting impatient.

PARKING PLACE -
Babe is in the midst
of an argument with
the man and his family
when the attendant
enters with the cop
of previous scenes.

COP: What's the trouble here?

MAN: I was leaving my car with
my family when this madman
backed in at forty miles
an hour and nearly killed
all of us.

COP: (Discovers Babe)
Oh, you again!
(Babe tries to explain)
Shut up. I'm going to make
you pay for this damage
or else!

Flash of Patsy still
stalling. The people
are sore as hell by now.
The Manager comes up.

MANAGER: Sorry, madam, but you'll have to step aside.

PATSY: Like fun I will! I'm waiting for my husband. This idiot won't trust me for three measly tickets.

MANAGER: Please, madam, you'll have to step aside!

Patsy gets out of line with Spanky.

PATSY: I'll kill your father for this!

Spanky starts looking around for Babe.

PARKING LOT -
The officer is making Babe pay the man.

MAN: Thanks, officer, for your courtesy.

COP: Don't mention it. That's what we're for - to protect the citizens from people like this.

The man and his family exit.

COP: (To Babe)
Now see here, another peep out of you and I'll lock you up!

Babe is so scared and embarrassed he bumps into a couple of cars getting away from the cop.

EXTERIOR THEATRE -
The man of previous scene is at the tail end of the line with family as Babe enters to the enraged Patsy and kid.

PATSY: So you finally decided to show up?

Babe is embarrassed because everyone is looking at him.

BABE: Sorry, dear. I had a little difficulty.



21.

PATSY: Oh silence the chatter and
get the tickets before I
lose my temper!

Babe jumps a couple of
people and gets to the
window.

CLOSEUP at window. Babe
gets the money out,
reaches over the line
and demands two and one-
half tickets. There is
a murmur from the crowd.
Babe insists that he
get the tickets.

CLOSEUP of the man and
family at the end of
the line. They do a
taken of astonishment.

MAN: Well, of all the gall!

He makes his wife take
his place and runs out
of scene.

CLOSEUP at window.
The man enters to Babe
and turns him around.

MAN: Say, who do you think you
are to butt in like this?
You'll go to the end of
the line!

PATSY: (Entering)
He'll do nothing of the
sort. I was up here long
ago. We'll get our tickets
now or else!

Closeup of Manager
at door doing a
taken. He exits.

CLOSEUP at Box office.
The manager enters
the argument and it
gets warmer.

CLOSEUP of Spanky and
Babe as the argument
is going on and we hear
Patsy declare herself -
there's nobody going in
ahead of her if it takes
all night - she knows
her rights!

Spanky pulls on Babe's pants and Babe looks down. Spanky gets the money out of Babe's hand and exits.

Spanky enters to the box office and gets the tickets. We hear the sound of the argument going on.

CLOSE SHOT - at curb. The manager is motioning off to the same policeman, who gets out of his car and exits with the manager.

INT. LOBBY - Spanky enters, gives the tickets to Patsy. She sees the manager coming with the cop and hands Babe his ticket.

PATSY: You settle it.

She and Spanky enter the theatre, as the cop and manager come up to Babe.

COP: Oh, you again! What is it now?

BABE: It's all a misunderstanding, officer, and it's all settled now.

He backs towards the theatre entrance.

CLOSE SHOT at entrance. Babe enters and hands the man his ticket, and is about to walk in.

MAN: This is a half ticket!

BABE: My wife and boy just went in and took my ticket by mistake.

MAN: I'm sorry, but you'll have to have a full ticket.

Babe flies into a tantrum that scares the doortender. He suddenly looks off and sees the cop and manager glaring at him. He calms down, politely tells the man he will secure another ticket, and exits.

At box office. Babe enters and in an embarrassed manner requests the girl to give him a full ticket. The manager and cop watch him.

INTERIOR LOBBY. Patsy is looking back worried.

PATSY: We'll have to find your father.

They start to exit on the opposite side to where they entered.

EXTERIOR LOBBY. Patsy and Spanky come out of exit door on the other side of the box office, as Babe is getting his ticket.

PATSY: Are you coming in or not?

BABE: Right now, dearest - everything is arranged.

Patsy and Spanky join him and they start to the door.

ENTRANCE. Babe, Patsy and Spanky start into the theatre but the man stops them.

MAN: (To Babe)
Where's their tickets?

SPANKY: You got them.

MAN: Not me.

PATSY: Why, you nit wit, I gave them to you myself!

MAN: Sorry, lady - everyone must have a ticket.

PATSY: Well I had a ticket - two tickets - and I'm here to tell you you won't get any more.

CLOSEUP of Babe, scared to death, looking off at the cop and trying to motion Patsy to desist.



Flash of the Manager
and cop, watching.

EXT. AT ENTRANCE.
Patsy is giving the
man hell.

BABE: Never mind, my dear. Why
argue with him. After all,
what's a couple of tickets?

He starts back to the
box office. Patsy
gives him a look -
she thinks he's nuts.
She and Spanky enter
the theatre.

BOX OFFICE.
Babe gets his tickets
and starts back to the
door in an embarrassed
manner - the manager
and cop watching him.

INTERIOR THEATRE.
Patsy and Spanky are
pushing their way in
to their seats, half
way down.

SPANKY: Where's Pop?

PATSY: Oh who cares? Keep still.

They get settled in
seats.

EXTERIOR THEATRE -
Babe enters, gives the
man his tickets and
enters, sore as
the devil.

Shooting in aisle of
darkened theatre -
towards entrance. We
hear the dialogue of the
film running as Babe
enters. Get over that
he is squinting his
eyes trying to see after
coming in out of the
bright lights.

Babe starts to feel his way down the aisle, much to the discomfort of those he handles. He feels a woman's head and she pans him. He excuses himself, then gets a man's toupe. By this time everyone is giving him dirty looks.

He goes on down the aisle - finally looks off and calls in a dainty voice:

BABE: Yoo hoo.

The whole audience answers him:

CROWD: YOC HOO!

Babe gets very much embarrassed.

CLOSE SHOT - Patsy and Spanky.

SPANKY: Pop's in another jam, Ma - he's lost.

PATSY: Go get him.

Spanky crowds out to the aisle.

Shot of aisle - shooting to back. Spanky comes into aisle and gets Babe. They start in to the seats.

Shooting over backs - Gable picture running on the screen. Babe and Spanky crowd in and Patsy gives him hell as he seats himself.

SPANKY: I can't see anything, Pop!

Babe whispers to him to stand up, and he does so only to have people back of him demand that the kid sit down. Babe takes Spanky and puts him on his lap.

Hardy puts his foot up
between seats. A man
comes in the row ahead
and sits down, squeezing
Babe's foot and he
yells bloody murder.
Everyone is annoyed.

Shoot over their backs,
showing screen. Patsy
is bobbing around, trying
to see over a large
tall man in front of her.

PATSY: I don't suppose it matters
to you if I see anything
or not.
(Points to big man in
front)
Before we were married, we
would have changed seats.

Babe takes it, puts
Spanky down and they
proceed to change seats.
There is a lot of "quiets"
and shushing going around
as they settle into place
after trouble of passing.

CLOSEUP - Babe, with
large man in foreground.
Babe is now bobbing
around. He taps the tall
man on the shoulder.

BABE: Pardon me, would you mind
sitting down?

MAN: I am sitting down.

Babe takes it and
slumps back into the
seat in disgust.

BABE: Thank you very much.

CLOSE SHOT - Patsy.
There is a drunk asleep
in the seat back of her.
She wakes him up:

PATSY: Does my hat bother you?

DRUNK Eh - what? - Yes, it
certainly does, and some-
thing should be done
about it!



PATSY: All right, all right, I'll take it off.

She does so and the drunk goes back to sleep.

Shooting to Babe, Patsy and Spanky. Spanky nudges his mother.

SPANKY: Give me my candy.

PATSY: Your father has it.

SPANKY: (To Babe)
I want my candy.

Babe shushes him and Spanky turns back to Patsy:

SPANKY: He won't give it to me.

PATSY: (Glaring at Babe)
Give him his candy!

Babe takes it and in a disgusted manner gets a bag of candy out of his pocket and gives it to Spanky, who gives him the Hardy nod of satisfaction.

CLOSEUP of Spanky trying to get the bag of candy open - the paper making a hell of a noise.

LONG SHOT - Spanky opening the bag and everyone annoyed. Babe takes the bag, and in opening it makes more noise than the kid did. The surrounding people shush him. He finally tears the bag open and hands it to Spanky, after Patsy glares at him.

CLOSEUP of Spanky. He puts a big chunk of peanut-brittle in his mouth and starts to chew it, making quite a noise.

Shot of the three. The kid is chewing and Babe gives him a dirty look. Spanky stops chewing. Babe does a double take at the candy and helps himself to a piece.

Closeup of the man in front of Babe - Babe background. Babe is chewing and making a noise that annoys the man in front, who takes it and gives Babe a dirty look. Babe stops chewing and the man turns front just as Babe starts to chew again. The man gives him another dirty look and Babe looks behind him to see what the man is looking at. The man turns front again disgusted. Babe is puzzled.

CLOSE SHOT - Spanky, Babe and Patsy. Babe is chewing and Patsy turns and looks at him.

PATSY: Cut that out! You're annoying everyone.

BABE: It isn't me - it's your son.

She looks at Spanky.

Big Head of Spanky with his mouth full of candy and his face all gooey. He mumbles something, but can't be understood.

Close shot of Three. Patsy takes it big, takes the candy away from the kid and turns to Babe:

PATSY: Give me your handkerchief.

BABE: (Searching)
I haven't got any.

PATSY: You never have anything!

Patsy opens her purse and in pulling her handkerchief out, pulls out a lot of small change, which falls to the floor with a clatter. Patsy takes it.

PATSY: I've dropped all my money!

Babe takes this and starts down to get it.

Shooting to a line of feet - Babe comes into scene and starts pushing legs away as he picks up various coins. He is about to pick up a quarter when a big shoe stamps on his hand. He lets out a yell.

LONG SHOT - Babe crying and people trying to quiet him. He raises up and asserts himself:

BABE: My wife has dropped her money and I am going to find it!

At this all the people dive under seats.

Shooting to floor - Everyone searching for money. Babe and another character make a dash for a coin at the same time and an argument starts.

Close shot - Patsy, disgusted. The drunk leans forward and wants to know what the trouble is. She gives him a dirty look and shoves him back into his seat.

Shooting to aisle - The manager comes down and demands that silence be maintained while the picture is going on.

LONG SHOT - Everyone settles back in their seats.

Babe comes up all mussed up.

PATSY: Did you get it all?

BABE: I don't know - I got a dollar sixty.

PATSY: That will do. I only lost eight cents.

Babe takes it as Patsy snatches the money from him and puts it in her purse.

Closeup of Patsy, putting the money back in her purse. She leans back and finds the drunk is leaning over the back of her seat.

PATSY: Well of all the gall!

- DRUNK: Don't mention it. It's quite all right.

Patsy takes a whiff of his liquor and nearly dies.

Long Shot of Babe, Spanky and Patsy.

PATSY: (To Babe)
Are you unconscious? Why don't you do something?

Babe, a little afraid, turns to the drunk.

BABE: See here, my good man, you are annoying my wife.

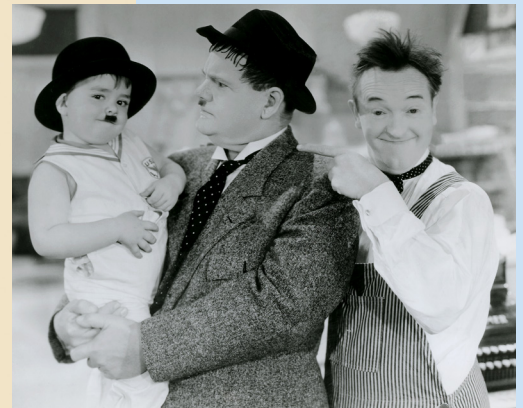
DRUNK: Want to make something of it?

He staggers to his feet, holding on to the seat to steady himself. Patsy and Babe also rise.

BABE: I certainly do, sir!

SPANKY: Sic 'em, Pop!

BABE: (To Spanky)
You keep out of this. I can handle it alone!



Babe gets scared as he looks off and sees the drunk trying to get out of his coat.

PATSY: Well, well, ain't you going to do something?

BABE: I certainly am!

PATSY: Well what?

BABE: I'm going to change our seats!

All the characters laugh as Babe starts out the aisle. The drunk breaks into a laugh and Patsy slams him one on the beezer.

PATSY: Laugh that off!

She and Spanky start out the aisle.

INTERIOR AISLE - Patsy and Spanky join Babe and they start down the aisle to the front.

Close shot - first row. The three take seats.

PATSY: (To Babe)
You have the backbone of a jelly fish!

SPANKY: Have you, Pop?

BABE: Certainly not!

He shows the kid. Everyone shushes them and they watch the picture.

Shot of the screen from their angle - everything distorted.

Cut back to the Three. Babe has his head way up in the air.

SPANKY: Hey Ma - Gable doesn't look so good from here. Guess I'll have to side with Pop.

Babe takes this and breaks into a laugh that causes everyone to shush him again. They quiet down and all look up - stretching their necks.

FADE OUT.

TITLE:

TWO FEATURES, A NEWSREEL,
A TRAVELOGUE AND A CARTOON
LATER - -

FADE IN:-

Shooting over the backs of several rows in the front. The picture is just ending, with music and end title. There is a little smattering of applause. The lights go up and there is general murmuring from the people.

Cut to the Three - Spanky is asleep in Patsy's lap. She starts to wake him up, then turns to Babe:

PATSY: What's the matter with you?

BABE: Matter enough. Let's get out of here. I've had enough.
(He gets over he has a stiff neck)

PATSY: I should say not! Tonight is gift night.

Shooting to the Stage - The screen goes up, disclosing a stage setting and a number of presents in full view of the audience - Radio, washing machine, pictures, lamps, groceries, a sewing machine, and a boy's large coaster wagon with steering wheel. The manager comes out and makes an announcement.

MANAGER: Ladies and gentlemen - we will now have the drawing for our beautiful gifts. The holders of the lucky numbers will have their choice of the beautiful articles here on display. We would like to have a little child from the audience to draw the lucky numbers.

Flashes of several proud parents trying to get their kids to go up.

Cut to the Hardy family. The manager indicates Spanky:

MANAGER: How about you, little boy?

SPANKY: Okey doke!
(Whispers to Babe)
What's your number, Pop?

BABE: (Looks at his ticket)
Five thirty three.

Babe smiles as the kid winks at him. They give each other the Hardy nod and Spanky exits. Babe is tickled to death - very proud of his kid.

Shooting to the stage - the manager and his assistant are shaking up the numbers in a large box, as Spanky comes forward.

MANAGER: Remember, the winners have their choice. Now, little boy, close your eyes and draw out one number.

Spanky puts his hand in the box and starts it around and around.

Closeup of Babe and Patsy.

BABE: I know my son - he'll call our number sure. I'll take that radio.

PATSY: You'll take the sewing machine!

MANAGER'S VOICE: Quiet, please. We are about to announce the first winning number.

PATSY: (Out of the corner of her mouth)
The sewing machine!

Close shot on Stage -
Spanky pulls out the ticket and looks at it.

MANAGER: Read it out, little man.

SPANKY: The number is 533.

MANAGER: Ah - five thirty three.

He takes the ticket without looking at it and places it in his pocket.

Long shot - Babe stands up as the manager calls for the number. There is a murmur as Babe starts for the stage in an embarrassed manner. In going up the steps at the side he falls, and the audience laugh. The manager helps him up and he enters to where Spanky is standing.



Close shot - Babe, Spanky and Manager.

MANAGER: Well, you lucky man, you have your choice.

BABE: Sir, this takes me quite unawares. I believe I'll take - -

PATSY'S VOICE: The sewing machine!

BABE: (Burning up)
I think I will take - -

PATSY'S
VOICE: He'll take the sewing
machine!

SPANKY: (Pulling on Babe's pants)
Take the wagon or I'll
squeal!

BABE: I think I'll take - -

PATSY'S
VOICE: The sewing machine!

SPANKY: It's the wagon or I'll
spill the beans!

BABE: Well, sir, it behooves me
not to think of myself.
I did want the radio, but
because it doesn't pay to
be selfish I'm going to
take - -

PATSY'S
VOICE: The sewing machine!

Babe is between a
sweat and a shine.

SPANKY: The wagon!

Babe finally chooses
the wagon and all applaud.

Shot of Patsy to match
into the above scene -
showing her reaction.

Babe and Spanky leave
the stage, thanking the
manager, etc.

Shooting to the Stage -
Long shot. Babe with the
wagon in his arms is
crowding along the first
row as the manager is
calling for another little
boy to come up and draw
another number. Babe and
wife and Spanky start up
the aisle.

Aisle shot. The little boy
of the parking lot episode
passes Spanky and the two
kids glare at each other.

Patsy tells her son to come on, and grabs him as the other kid proceeds to the stage.

Closeup of the kid's father doing a takem.

Long shot of Aisle. Patsy and Spanky pass the man. Babe has the wagon up in his arms. The fellow sticks out his foot and Babe falls forward on the wagon.

Shooting down aisle to stage. Babe is lying on the wagon, yelling his famous Hardy yell as the wagon coasts backwards down the aisle into the orchestra pit. There is a terrific crash as he supposedly falls into the drummer's outfit.

Closeup of Babe coming up out of the wreckage.

Longer shot as Babe gets out of the pit, picks up the wagon and gets out as soon as he can.

Interior Lobby. Patsy is waiting with Spanky as Babe comes in with the wagon. She starts to jump on him, and he has a terrible time getting through the door with the wagon.

Shooting to Stage. The little kid draws a number and calls it:

KID: Five thirty three.

MANAGER: (Takes it big)
There must be some mistake!

He looks at the ticket,
then looks at the one
in his pocket.

MANAGER: Oh, I regret to say there
has been a terrible
mistake. The first
number was 766.

Closeup - Man of the
parking lot episode.

MAN: Why, that's my number. And
that other fellow has
the wagon I wanted!

Closeup on Stage. The
kid starts crying.

KID: I want my wagon!

MANAGER: I'm sorry, but there is
nothing I can do about it.

MAN: No? Well, I can do some-
thing! That's my wagon
and I'm going to get it!

He is joined by his wife
and kid and they leave
amid applause.

EXT. PARKING LOT (NIGHT).
Closeup at Hardy's car.
Babe, Patsy and Spanky
are on with the coaster.
Babe is laughing his
head off.

BABE: We sure put it over on
them!

SPANKY: Where do you get that WE
stuff?

BABE: (Takes it, then to
Patsy:)
Isn't he cute?

PATSY: Oh, you think it's cute,
do you? Well, let's get
out of here before they
find out what you two
crooks did!

Babe picks up the coaster
and tells the wife to
open the door of the car.
(He could have put it
right over the top.)

MAN'S
VOICE: WAIT!

They all take it. The menace enters to Babe, and Spanky runs and gets behind Patsy's skirt.

Closeup of Babe and the Menace.

MAN: You can't get away with this! I had the winning ticket and the wagon's mine!

BABE: I'm sorry, my dear sir. Finders keepers, and possession is nine points of the law. Anyone will tell you that. So we will let the matter rest.
(To Patsy:) Get in, dear.

The fellow roughly turns Babe around and glares at him, scaring him to death.

MAN: Do I get that wagon?

Babe hesitates, then gets courage.

BABE: Certainly not!

The man reaches up, gets a good grip on Babe's nose and gives it a twist. Babe takes it.

Longer shot - Babe is holding his nose.

PATSY: Are you going to stand for that?

BABE: I consider the source, my dear. I shall not lower myself to physical combat.

PATSY: Well I'm not so particular!

She exits and the two men watch her.

Close shot at the man's automobile. Patsy enters, kicks a headlight in, looks off and gives the Hardy nod of satisfaction.

Closeup of Babe and the Menace. Babe is scared to death. The man does a taken of amazement and punches Babe on the nose.

Closeup of Patsy. She kicks the other headlight in.

Closeup of Babe and the man. He punches Babe in the nose again. Babe takes it and rushes out of scene.

Babe enters to Patsy.

BABE: Why don't you help me?

PATSY: I'm doing all I can.

BABE: But what you're doing is a detriment.

He holds his nose. They look off, do a taken and both start out.

Close shot at Babe's car. The man is trying to lift the coaster out. Patsy and Babe enter and a struggle starts. The man's wife enters and Patsy takes care of her.

Closeup of Spanky.

SPANKY: Sic 'em, Pop! Sic 'em!

He takes out his whistle and blows the siren.

Close - Attendant. He looks off, does a taken and exits in a hurry.

Flash of the fight - people running in.

Spanky on top of the car
has a piece off the fence
and is smacking the man
whenever he can.

Flash of Cop arriving to
attendant.

Closeup of Spanky on top
of the car. He has a
brick, which he heaves
out of scene.

Closeup of the Menace's
car. The brick flies in
and smashes the windshield.

Closeup of Babe and the
Menace. He has Babe by
the throat as he sees
the damage to his car,
and rushes out.

Closeup of Attendant at
cop's car. The cops get
out and all rush out of
scene.

Long shot - the cops push
their way through the crowd
and get between Babe and
the Menace, who each have
a side of the coaster.

Close shot of group.

COP: What's going on here?

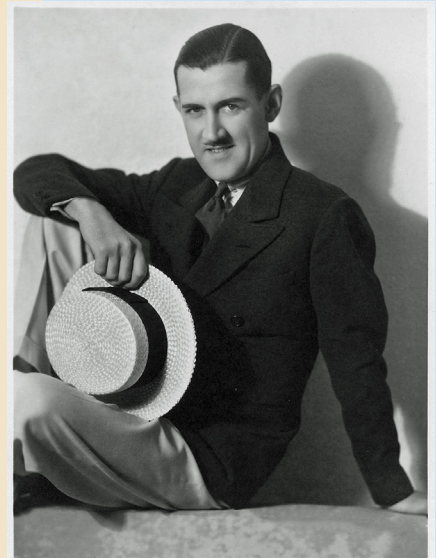
MAN: This man is trying to get
away with my property.

The cop turns and sees
Babe, does a big take.

COP: Ah - you again!
(He grabs Babe.

Closeup - Patsy and
Spanky.

PATSY: It's all over but the
shouting.



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SPANKY: That's my friend!
(He exits)

Close shot - Group.
The Menace has the
coaster.

COP: Take it away - it's yours.

The Menace goes back-
ground with his wife and
kid, tickled to death.
The cop turns to Babe:

COP: I'm going to arrest you for
disturbing the peace!

SPANKY: (Entering)
Hey, mister - that man's
stealing my wagon!

COP: (Takes it big)
Is that your wagon? Why,
the big stiff!
(He starts back)

Close shot at the
Menace's machine.
The cop enters and grabs
the coaster from the
man.

COP: How dare you rob a baby!

The man goes to say
something but the cop
shuts him up:

COP: A word out of you and I'll
jail you!

He exits with the wagon.

The cop enters to Spanky
and gives him the wagon.

COP: Here you are, sonny.
(To Babe:)
A big lunk like you don't
deserve a kid like this!

BABE: Yes sir. Thank you, sir.

He gets embarrassed and
exits with Spanky and
the wagon.

COP: Now everyone beat it!

Close shot at Babe's car. Patsy is waiting as Babe enters, puts the wagon in back, gets in and gives the Menace a laugh. They see the menace in a threatening attitude and start out in a hurry.

Flash of the Menace in his car. He looks like he is coming for Babe.

Long shot - Babe's car starts to exit. Babe is watching the menace and does not see another car coming out. They crash with a bang.

Close shot of the two cars. The cop rushes in and an argument starts between Babe, Patsy and the man who was wrecked.

Closeup of the Menace and his family.

WIFE: Now's your chance.

MAN: I'll show him!

He puts the car into gear and starts out.

Long shot - the Menace's car crashes into Babe's and everybody does a brodie.

Close shot of Babe, Patsy and Spanky. Patsy's hat is over one ear. They look off.

Closeup - the Menace and his wife are glaring at them.

MAN: That's what I do to thieves!

Closeup of Babe and Patsy.
They take it.

PATSY: Give 'em the works!

BABE: Hold tight!

Long shot - Babe backs his car up, gets a good run and crashes the rear end of the Menace's machine.

Closeup of the Menace and his family coming up out of the bottom of their car.

Flash of the cop blowing his whistle and dashing out.

Flash of Babe, Patsy and Spanky, congratulating each other. We hear the cop bawling out the Menace.

Closeup of Menace and family - the cop bawling them out. He orders them to beat it.

Long shot - The Menace pulls out, dragging the front wheels of Babe's car, which goes down with a crash.

Closeup of Babe and family recovering. They look at each other in disgust.

WIPE TO:
Long shot of street. Spanky in the coaster is steering Babe's car, which is resting on the rear of the coaster. Babe is disgusted and Patsy is giving him hell.

FADE OUT.



Charley Chase fans might recognize that the script is a partial reworking/update of his last silent comedy short subject, *Movie Night* (1929), produced by the Hal Roach Studios and released through M-G-M.

Stan Laurel rejoined his screen partner Oliver Hardy to resume work on *Bonnie Scotland*, so the Hardy Family script was recycled. It went through several revisions (under the working titles *Wrong Number*, *A Tale of Two Tickets*, and *It Happened One Bank Night*) and became the basis for Charley Chase's first starring role in a feature length comedy, *Bank Night* (1936). Chase assumed the lead, Rosina Lawrence filled the spot originally slated for Patsy Kelly, and the McFarland role was assigned to four-year-old Our Gang alum Darla Hood.

The Call Bureau Cast Service sheet credits the original story to Charles Parrott (Chase's real name) and Harold Law, while the screenplay is attributed to Richard Flournoy and Arthur Vernon Jones. There are no on-screen credits provided for either story or screenplay.

The feature length version of the film was previewed several times receiving primarily positive reviews, but M-G-M had little interest in distributing Hal Roach's feature length product — even less for a feature starring Charley Chase. As such, the studio ultimately cut the picture down to two-reels and retitled it *Neighborhood House*.

Neighborhood House was released on May 9th, 1936. Despite the solid reviews, short subjects were being phased out and this was to be Chase's last for the Hal Roach Studios.



HAL ROACH presents **Charley CHASE**

THEATRE BANK NIGHT

EXPLOITATION

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS NATURAL CONTEST IDEA

In "Neighborhood House" Charley Chase is embarrassed by his little daughter when she is chosen to draw the lucky number on Bank Night. Every parent at one time or another has experienced similar embarrassing moments as a result of some childish prank. Here is a contest idea for your newspaper that will meet with tremendous reader response and also a tieup which is perfect for your film. Let the newspaper ask readers to relate in brief form actual laughable situations in which they were placed by the unexpected action of some youngster. A guest ticket to see your film would be offered for each contribution printed and a special prize of some sort might also be awarded to the funniest of all the contributions received.

GET EXTRA PATRONS WITH LUCKY TICKET STUNT

Arrange with your largest local chain of grocery or drug stores to insert in all their packages for a week a numbered ticket with the following copy: "TRY YOUR LUCK! Ten persons of the so-and-so stores will be admitted free each day this week at the State Theatre — if the number on this ticket appears on the bulletin board in the theatre lobby your lucky ticket will admit you to see Charley Chase as the holder of the lucky ticket on theatre bank night in his latest comedy "Neighborhood House."

USE "MONEY" FOR ATTENTION—GETTING WINDOW

For a real attention-getting window display, obtain from a candy store several dozen pieces of the chocolate that is wrapped with metal foil to resemble silver and gold coins of various denominations. Place these in a window in an open money bag so that some of the "coins" will scatter about the floor of the window. Have a placard with the copy: Charley Chase took a chance, why not you? Guess how many coins are contained in the money bag. Guest tickets to see Charley's new comedy "Neighborhood House," at the Theatre, will be awarded for the twenty closest estimates received.

STAGE YOUR OWN BANK NIGHT—HERE'S HOW

Here is a stunt of proven boxoffice results that you may be able to adapt for "Neighborhood House." Contact your best local bank with the suggestion that they cooperate with you on a plan which is bound to bring them any number of new savings accounts. They agree to furnish you with a check for one dollar to be given to each and every patron of your theatre during the showing of "Neighborhood House." The checks are imprinted payable to bearer and signed by an to the condition that the dollar can be used only as the original deposit in opening a savings account, and that the dollar will not be paid until after the savings account has been kept active for a period of one year. Obviously you will want to take every advantage of the boxoffice possibilities of this stunt. Get trailers on your screen the week in advance, make up special heralds and include in your newspaper ads the fact that you are putting on a real Bank Night in connection with Charley Chase's comedy on Bank Nights; that so many thousand dollars will be handed out to your patrons and that every one of them will receive a share of the money.

" in NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE"

DIRECTED BY
CHARLES PARROTT AND HAROLD LAW

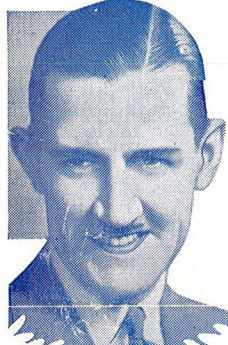


PUBLICITY

CHARLEY CHASE GETS LAUGHS FROM EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

Uses No Make-Up In Portraying Average Young Man — Other Shorts

When Charley Chase entered the ranks of comedy stars more than a decade ago, he brought a new type of fun-making to the screen. Previous to that time, comedians had relied upon comic make-up and incongruous clothing to bring about a laugh or to make their actions more laughable. Not so with Chase. On the contrary, he dressed just as any average American of moderate circumstances. He was the picture of an average young man trying to make good. He left the situations provide the laughs. In his latest Hal Roach-M-G-M comedy, "Neighborhood House", the theatre's current comedy attraction, the comedian is presented as a modern young office-worker eagerly anticipating his chance at winning a theatre prize night award. In winning it, he has many hilarious complications heaped on his head.

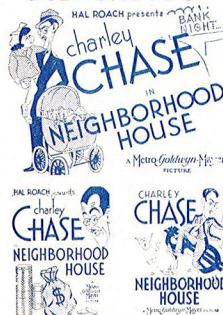


CHARLEY CHASE in HAL ROACH Comedies

(Above Mat FREE at MGM Exchange)
A screen career at the age of four is the distinction which Darla Hood enjoys. Darla, who plays the daughter of Charley Chase in the Hal Roach-M-G-M comedy "Neighborhood House" currently showing at Theatre, was noticed in New York City by the Hal Roach talent scout last summer. She so impressed the representative that he immediately made a screen test of her. The result was a contract as leading lady of "Our Gang" comedies. Since that time she has appeared in a number of the juvenile pictures and had a featured role in "The Bohemian Girl" starring Laurel and Hardy. In "Neighborhood House", Darla plays an important part in the hilarious mix up which besets her father.

Charley Chase, Rosina Lawrence and Darla Hood head the cast of the hilarious Hal Roach-M-G-M comedy "Neighborhood House" which is coming to Theatre next. As Mr. and Mrs. Charley Chase and their daughter, Mary Chase, the three attend the neighborhood theatre on a prize night, hoping to win the award. After a series of complications, the Chase family wins, but the results are far from their expectations. "Neighborhood House" is described as one of the most hilarious Charley Chase shorts ever produced.

AD MATS



NEWSPAPER AD MATS FREE! AT YOUR MGM EXCHANGE

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

The end of an era is marked by "Neighborhood House", the Hal Roach-M-G-M comedy starring Charley Chase which comes to Theatre next. For more than a decade, the Charley Chase series of short comedies have been famous, but the comedians efforts will hereafter be devoted to features if present plans hold good. When Chase started working for the comedy king, he doubted he would be with the company very long — that was seventeen years ago! He had been called in to direct and write a few comedies. After several years in this capacity, he returned to acting just as a joke in one picture. But the exhibitors clamored for more of Chase! So started the famous series which closes with "Neighborhood House".

NEW STAR IS LAUNCHED BY CHARLEY CHASE

Rosina Lawrence One Of Many Who Started As His Leading Lady

Captivating Rosina Lawrence, in playing opposite Charley Chase in the Hal Roach-M-G-M comedy "Neighborhood House" currently showing at Theatre, steps into the footsteps of a number of famous leading ladies who found fame and fortune on the same path. Lupe Velez, Fay Wray, Jean Harlow, the late Thelma Todd and others equally prominent in the screen world made their starts as leading ladies for Hollywood's outstanding bashful Beau Brummel, who has held sway in the comedy field for almost a quarter of a century.

Miss Lawrence's success is a shining example of what sheer determination can accomplish. As a child, on the first day spent in a Hollywood school, she suffered a fall which wrought partial paralysis with possibilities of life-long slavery to a wheel-chair.

Aided by her parents, the young actress went through a long series of massages and exercises with indomitable courage. The result was successful. Part of the exercises consisted of dancing lessons. It was her dancing that first attracted the attention of film executives.

Catchlines

USE 'EM IN ADS AND POSTERS

IT'S THE PAYOFF in laughs as Charley wins the jackpot on theatre bank night

Charley goes to the theatre on Bank Night — and you can bank on plenty of laughs!

Charley thought he was lucky — until his ticket won the prize on theatre bank night!

Charley is chased by the whole neighborhood when he gets lucky on theatre bank night

Chase Comedy Ribs "Bank Night" Craze

A notable example of Hollywood's increasing tendency to build screen stories founded on actual fads and foibles of the modern scene is the short comedy "Neighborhood House", which is a satire on the current "bank night craze" among theatres.

Comedian Charley Chase provides many a laugh as the movie patron who holds the lucky ticket. Produced by Hal Roach, the cast also includes Rosina Lawrence and the "Our Gang" youngster Darla Hood.

At a Glance!

HAL ROACH
Presents
CHARLEY CHASE
In
"NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE"
With
ROSINA LAWRENCE
DARLA HOOD
Directed by
Charles Parrott and Harold Law

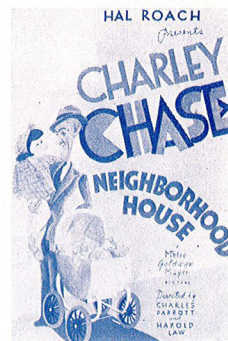
Highlights

Charley Chase is a hard-working, loyal office-worker. But on "Bank Night" at the neighborhood theatre, he disregards his employer's instructions to work late. Rushing home, he eats dinner in a hurry and with his wife and daughter goes to the theatre. There, he almost starts a riot trying to remember his number.

When the time of the drawing arrives, Chase's little daughter offers to do the drawing. Unable to read, she calls out her father's number. Greatly elated, Chase rushes to the platform. Upon the discovery of the mistake, another drawing takes place. The little daughter's number is drawn. The boos of the audience cause Chase to ask the manager to draw another number himself. Mrs. Chase's number is drawn this time.

The Chase's are chased home by the whole crowd. There Charley receives a telephone call from his boss firing him. Then, the Chase family offers to return the money for another drawing the next night. Charley arrives breath-

POSTER



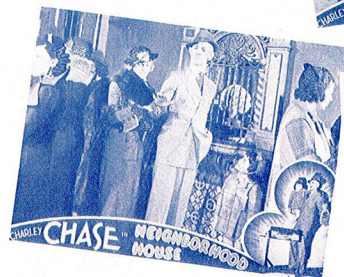
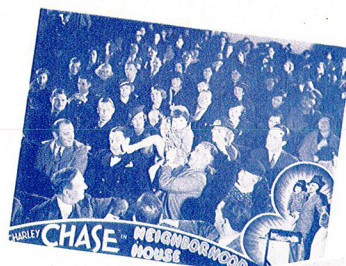
ONE-SHEET

lessly at the theatre carrying the money in a baby buggy. The crowd insists that the venerable old judge of the community do the drawing and make him remove his coat and cuffs before doing so. Charley's boss wins this time.

With Charley muttering to his wife and daughter, "Something tells me we'd better run," the picture ends.

EIGHT 11 x 14 LOBBY PHOTOS

SELL THE COMPLETE SHOW—Give your program the attention it deserves in your lobby. The eight lobby card displays pictured below are printed in rich sepia brown on heavy card stock and will prove a decorative as well as practical asset to any theatre lobby.





Fans worldwide were grateful that Laurel and Hardy were able to resume their partnership, going on to create twenty-two additional years of unparalleled comedy. However, one cannot help but wonder how the teaming of Hardy, Kelly, and MacFarland might have fared. The idea of Spanky playing Hardy's son was inspired, the pairing ripe for comic mayhem, and Patsy Kelly, with her letter-perfect wisecracking, was the ideal foil to further deflate Hardy's mock pomposity. It is difficult to imagine a better combination.

While the new series never made it to the screen, at least the original script and the two Chase shorts survive to provide us with some insight into what the Hardy Family might have looked like. Or a reasonable facsimile thereof.

For additional information, the author suggests the following works: *Laurel and Hardy: The Magic Behind the Movies* (Revised and Expanded Ultimate Third Edition) by Randy Skretvedt, *A History of the Hal Roach Studios* by Richard Lewis Ward, *Smile When the Raindrops Fall* by Brian Anthony and Andy Edmonds, and *100 Years of Brodies With Hal Roach* by Craig Calman.

Thanks to: AFI Catalog, Robert Arkus, Nico Cartenstadt, Gierucki Studios LLC, Bernie Hogya, LettersFromStan.com, Media History Digital Library, Andrew Pagana, Richard M. Roberts, Chris Seguin, Randy Skretvedt, Yair Solan, and Richard Lewis Ward.





Forgot to join?
Tain't funny, McGee!



S.P.E.R.D.V.A.C.

The Society to Preserve and Encourage
Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy



OUR GANG

The Jean Darling 'Jinx'

By David B. Pearson

Looking at the subtitle of this article, it doesn't seem to make the slightest bit of sense. Jean Darling was a charming child actress, and arguably the most lovely little girl ever to appear in an Our Gang film. Her career with the Gang lasted for 35 two-reelers over four seasons at the Hal Roach Studios. That's three years of silents, and a year of talkies.

Nevertheless, unless one was an Our Gang affectionate, very little of Jean Darling can be seen today on broadcast television. Admittedly, today one can seek out most anything on social media, and a set of these silents was released in Germany about a decade ago. But these are far, far from the mainstream access. This is because most late silent films — in particular films released by MGM, which released the Roach films from 1927 to 1938 (and started not too long after Darling joined Our Gang) — remain in copyrighted status, and cannot legally be shown in public without the current owner's permission. So, even if somebody even wanted to show Our Gang on TV, these titles would be the hardest to see.

Compounding the issue, of the 221 titles in Our Gang series, 88 of them are silents, and of those, some 82 of 88 titles are known to at least partially exist. The other six are still considered lost. All six of those missing films are from the aforementioned Roach/MGM era!

That leaves Jean Darling's single year of five sound film appearances. Three of those, *Small Talk*, *Railroadin'*, and *Lazy Days*, are withheld from current television packages for various reasons, while a fourth film, *Bouncing Babies*, has been edited down from two reels to one, with all of Jean's scenes in the film removed!



Jean Darling

What remains is a single title, *Boxing Gloves*. Jean does appear in that — for the grand total of 68 seconds. And even that might have been cut down a bit, as current prints of *Boxing Gloves* run about 17 minutes rather than the expected 20.

And were that not enough of an unfortunate happenstance, the films of this era have been generally regarded as a fallow period in the history of the series.

The ultimate resource on this topic, Leonard Maltin and Richard Bann's *Our Gang: The Life and Times of the Little Rascals* (aka *The Little Rascals: The Life and Times of Our Gang*) attempts to explain this as a gap where the series had lost the momentum



Mary Ann Jackson

that it had earlier held during the Mickey Daniels/Mary Kornman years, where Daniels was so wonderfully charismatic as to be a character the audience could root for, and a general formula the series would not quite regain until Jackie Cooper joined the Gang.

Other events happening simultaneously on Roach's Lot of Fun would seem to confirm this view. From 1925 onward, Charley Chase had really come into his own, moving from one reelers to two and making some of the finest comedy shorts of the entire era. Likewise, the teaming of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy had exploded onto the screen with the distribution change from Pathé to MGM, and would dominate the



Joe Cobb



Harry Spear



Pete the Pup (aka Pal)



Jackie Condon



Bobby "Wheezer" Hutchins

lot during the next decade. So at this point, the Our Gang unit was, at best, seen as the studio's third string.

Nevertheless, seeing the films of the 1920s today is to see it in a very different light than the people who saw it 43 years ago (or, for that matter, 90 years ago). Today, the repeated nature of having a white male always being the principal protagonist in a movie is not always a good thing.

This is, of course, something that all film historians need to struggle with — in particular those studying silent film comedy, as this genre, like the Western, has an abundance of white male performers s populating it. Since the time they were made, they (and we) are trapped in seeing films in the perspective of the times in which they are viewed. We change. The films of the past do not. As such, it seems most fitting that we should see these films in the spirit of the audience they were intended for, not with emotions of a modern contemporary viewer.

Although white males were still in the majority during this era of Our Gang, they didn't dominate. It was the time where others could hold sway. It was the time for the girls, for a child of color, and even for a canine. And at the time, this was simply the natural order of things.

And these changes in Our Gang lead to the final real bit of that Jonah hex that seems to have followed Jean Darling around: being a beautiful little "leading lady" cast in the Mary Kornman/Darla Hood niche, endlessly waiting for a Mickey Daniels or Al-



Allen "Farina" Hoskins



Our Gang, Class of 1928-29

falfa Switzer who never shows up (although Joe Cobb tried).

Instead, a new type of girl appeared in Our Gang: Mary Ann Jackson — the hell-raising "Bubbles" fresh from Mack Sennett's "Smith Family" two-reelers. To see Jackson's performances in the "Smith" films is to have a revelation. She was not only performing in a comedy series prior to the Gang, she was starring in it, and came to Our Gang as a seasoned vet at the age of four already having carried two years of slapstick mayhem on her tiny shoulders.

Jackson's tomboy character was not only the antitheses of the traditional Our Gang girl, she was the very essence of the 1920s flapper — as rough and tough as the boys, and maybe a little rougher. That auburn-haired Mary Ann wore a pageboy haircut in the style of auburn-haired Colleen Moore — in the same way Mary Kornman had echoed Mary Pickford or how Shirley Jean Rickett later echoed jazz-baby Alice White. As such, the "salty dog" Jackson was a breath of fresh air, and quickly overshadowed the more established Darling. Indeed, Jackson would star in titles such as *Growing Pains*, *The Spanking Age*, *The Holy Terror*, *Wiggle Your Ears* and *Little Mother*.

Jeepers! *The Holy Terror*! Just imagining Mary Ann reverting to

her "Bubbles" character brings up gleeful thoughts of cinematic chaos. One can grieve that this film is one of the lost six.

When seeing the entire available Our Gang canon, it seems so natural that Mary Ann could (and would) beat the tar out of Jackie Cooper. And she would do it more than once.

The one person Jackson could never dominate was Allen Clayton "Farina" Hoskins. Nobody could. Not Wheezer. Not Mickey Daniels. Not Cooper (although Jackie could come close). Certainly not any of the later sound kids. No other kid touched America's heart like Farina.

Our Gang might have been created with Ernie Morrison in mind, but it is Farina that is the anchor. He is the "Chaplin" of the series. We laugh at him. We laugh with him. We feel for him. We identify with him. If this series had a genius, it was him.

And he is at his very best in this "slump" period. Sure, Farina had starred in films earlier in the series, such as *Seein' Things* (1924) and *Your Own Back Yard* (1925), but Our Gang's second epoch showed Farina at his finest.

Take *Love My Dog* from 1927, where Farina's pet stray is taken by the dog catcher because it lacks a license. For the balance of the short, Farina tries desperately

to raise the funds to save his pet, only for the money to almost magically fall into his hands. Desperately racing to the pound, Farina seems to be too late. The reaction of the child is devastating, with real tears flowing freely from his eyes. Only an ogre would not identify with Farina, and sympathize with his plight. That the film ends happily in no way detracts from the power of what came before.

Even more telling is *Spook Spoofing* (1928). Let there be no doubt — *Spook Spoofing* is a very racist film. There are many moments peppered though *Our Gang* of stereotypical gags, and Farina got more than his share of these. In silent *Our Gangs* in general, (and in many silent comedy films period) there are enough watermelon and fried chicken “jokes,” and dialect intertitles to make any reasonable person shudder.

But this time, it's different.

This time it *isn't* a cardboard black stereotype for '20s audiences to laugh at. It's Farina, a child Americans had been watching grow up on screen for over half a decade. And it really strikes the viewer about abuse in a personal way. Farina, for audiences of 1928, was a beloved member of *OUR* gang.

Here, we see long-time white friends of Farina, like Harry Spear and Joe Cobb, perform a series of practical “jokes” on him. Doing one such joke could be funny. Twice is unfair. Three times is abuse. And it keeps on happening... And it becomes, far, far from funny. And it looks like the makers of *Spook Spoofing* knew this. Maybe that's why it's three reels long, to hammer home some basic morality. Without doubt, the audience is on Farina's side.

Ironically, it is not Farina's race that is the cause of all this abuse, but his creed. Part of the black stereotype is the idea that 1920s African Americans believed in ghosts and zombies. So they victimize Farina by tricking him into believing a ghastly practical joke — Farina having to bury a “dead” Harry, supposedly stuck down by Farina's voodoo curse, in a grave-



1929s *Our Gang* meets a comic legend: Harry Langdon

yard. However, a midday eclipse of the sun proves they really believe as Farina does, giving them their comeuppance by exposing them as hypocrites, and redeeming Farina into the Gang. Certainly, grossly offensive by today's standards, but people in 1928 would have seen the underlining humanity.

Lastly, one must mention Pete the Pup (aka Pal) in *Dog Heaven* (1927). If there is one film that showcases the absolute proof that silent film is a unique art form, it is here. Outside of a cartoon, only in a silent film could a comedy be presented from an animal's point of view, and the material here isn't for children. Let's see: Pete the Pup tries suicide (twice), has a love life, and falls into a drunken squalor straight out of a D.W. Griffith film. The dog's performance is stellar, stealing every scene he's in. Grant-

ed, it's not a film for the children of 2020, but it's fantastic on its own merits.

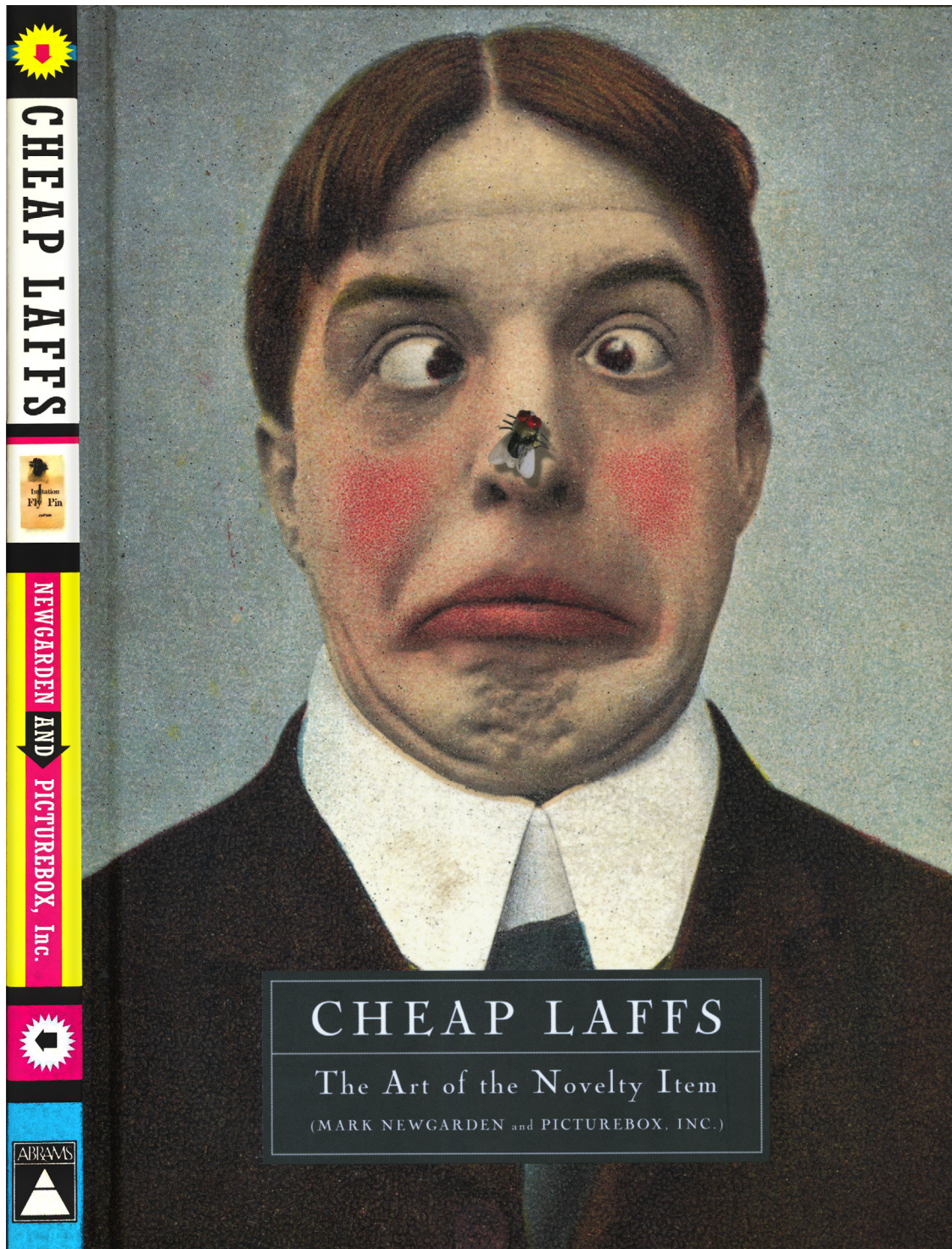
The coming of sound heralded the end of this unique time in *Our Gang*. Within two years — save Wheezer Hutchins — all the silent film *Our Gangers* were let go from the series. Even Pete the Pup was washed away, replaced by one of this own offspring.

What a great loss. From our perspective the *Our Gang* films of 1926-1929 might have been “jinxed,” (Jean Darling in particular) in that so few them are seen beyond the eyes of the devoted fans. But these films were never representative of a slump. Indeed, these years are now probably the most underrated material in the entire series.

But look at the bright side: Jean Darling was lucky to be in some good, interesting comedies. It could have been a lot worse. If one wants to talk about a series slump, think about those post-Roach *Our Gang* films made after 1938!



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BUSTER KEATON

What You Thought You Knew

By Patricia Eliot Tobias

*"I cannot tell how the truth may be;
I say the tale as 'twas said to me."
— Sir Walter Scott*

We've all heard the urban legends, those untrue and unlikely but oft-repeated stories – that a stagehand hung himself from a *papier maché* tree during the filming of *The Wizard of Oz*, that Bill Cosby bought up and destroyed all existing prints of the Our Gang films; that Max Fleischer's animators inserted a cel of Betty Boop naked into a cartoon.

But what of the myths, the misleading statements, the factual errors, the out-and-out lies that pop up in biographies and develop a life of their own? The truth, once tarnished, hardly ever shines again like new. As far back as Aristotle, who said, "The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousand-fold," historians have grappled with the issue of error and its long-lasting consequences on the search for truth.

How many of us know that Marco Polo never reached China; that Richard III didn't murder his nephews; or that an apple never fell on Isaac Newton's head? And if we knew, would we care? British writer Paul Scott nailed the problem when he said, "Ah, well, the truth is always one thing, but in a way it's the other thing, the gossip, that counts. It shows where people's hearts lie."

In doing research on the life and career of Buster Keaton, I have stumbled on misleading statements, factual errors, gossip and lies that have woven a fabric of myths that, unfortunately, many people believe to be true. There was a time when I, too, believed what I read. But over the years, I slowly began to untangle those myths and get at the heart of the truth.

Of course, Keaton is not the only film personality whose life story has been embellished or stained with inaccuracies. The obvious example would be his great and good friend Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, whose reputation, career and, ultimately, his life, were ruined when he was accused of a monstrous crime that never even took place. The lesson here is *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware. Enjoy reading biographies, but read them with a skeptical mind and a reasoned heart. Just because a book is loaded with acknowledgments and footnotes, or because the author writes authoritatively, does not mean the information included is based in reality.



Buster Keaton

All of the myths that follow have been published, a few of them repeatedly. In some cases, we know exactly where the myth began; in others, it's harder to find the origin. Some myths are easy to dispel; others a complicated mess. And in some cases, we don't know the actual truth, but must make educated guesses.

Myth: Buster's middle name was Francis.

Nope. It was Frank. He was named after a relative.

Myth: Buster Keaton got his start working for Mack Sennett

Sennett, who did give Charlie Chaplin, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Harold Lloyd their starts in film, originated this myth. In his autobiography, Sennett mentioned Keaton as one of his discoveries. Well-intentioned encyclopedia writers picked up on it, so this myth appears in several otherwise reputable sources. Simply not true and easy to disprove. Buster did work/

CODE NO. 2440 KEATON, BUSTER 13597-257
10-7-42

Form W-4
U. S. TREASURY DEPARTMENT
Internal Revenue Service

573-05-2855
BUSTER KEATON
1043 VICTORIA AVE.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

EMPLOYEE'S WITHHOLDING EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE
(Collection of Income Tax at Source on Wages)

Name JOSEPH FRANK "BUSTER" KEATON
(Print full name)

Street 1043 VICTORY AVE
(Print home address)

Postoffice Town LOS ANGELES Zone No. 6

Social Security No. 573-05-2855

I. Check the box in the line below which applies to you on the date this form is filled in:

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Married person living with husband or wife but claiming half of the personal exemption (2) ☐

Single person (not head of a family) or married person not living with husband or wife (not head of a family) (3) ☐

Married person living with husband or wife and claiming all of the personal exemption (spouse claiming none of the exemption) (4) ☒

Head of a family (a single person or married person not living with husband or wife who exercises family control and supports closely connected dependent relative(s) in one household) (5) ☐

II. Number of dependents receiving chief support from you who are either under 18 years of age or incapable of self support because mentally or physically defective..... ☐

I declare that the entries made herein are a true and complete statement as of the date indicated, pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code and the regulations issued under authority thereof.

Date JUNE 24th, 1943 (Signature) Buster Keaton

Keaton's W4 form.

collaborate with Mack Sennett several times later on: Sennett directed Keaton in the Educational Pictures two-reel short subject *The Timid Young Man* (1935). Sennett also directed the rest of the Keaton clan in the Educational short *Way Up Thar* (1935), and both Sennett and Keaton appear in the feature *Hollywood Cavalcade* (1939). These connections, and others, may have also helped to perpetuate the myth.

Myth: Buster Keaton was given his nickname by Harry Houdini.

The circumstances are relatively clear. When little Joe Keaton Jr. was about six months old, he fell down a flight of stairs. According to some versions he laughed when he landed. In others, he cried a little but was essentially unharmed. A friend of the Keaton family, George W. Pardey, saw the tumble and said something to the effect of "That's quite a buster your kid took!" and the name stuck.

Several variations of the story were repeated in the early vaudeville years. One clipping from July 20, 1901, describes it this way: "... the name Buster was conferred upon him by the members of the company with which his parents were then touring. The name has clung to him, and he finds it an admirable one under which to exploit his work in vaudeville." By this time Houdini was the biggest star in vaudeville, so if he was responsible, why wasn't he mentioned?

Other stories name specific vaudeville performers—not Houdini—who had supposedly planted the moniker on him. Even the midwife who delivered Buster on October 4, 1895, in Piqua, Kansas, claimed she gave him the nickname on the day he was born!

The people who run the Houdini museum in Wisconsin have nothing in their records to support the idea that Houdini was the man who named Buster "Buster." However, neither do they know anything that would disprove it. They have almost complete records of Houdini's career except for the crucial years during which this incident would have taken place. Certainly the Keatons were friendly with the Houdinis and did go on tour with them in a medicine show immediately before Houdini became a world-famous magician. It's also clear from surviving letters and documents that they remained friendly, so Houdini apparently did not object to getting credit for giving Buster his name—even though it's clear that he didn't.

Myth: Buster never laughed or smiled on stage or screen.

This one's easy. During his childhood stage appearances, Keaton was not a stone-faced performer, at least not always. As early as Nov. 5, 1904, Earl Remington of the vaudeville act Hines and Remington, wrote the follow ditty about nine-year-old Buster for the family's weekly ad in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*:

"Love to 'BUSTER,' the Irrepressible
Whose 'HIT' is always incontestable.
Long may he flourish to beguile
the Public with his potent Smile."

Keaton laughed or smiled in almost all of his early film appearances with his friend and mentor, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. He was particularly animated in *Coney Island*, *Goodnight, Nurse!*, *The Rough House* and *Oh, Doctor!* Later on, there's a broad Keaton smile at the finale of the 1934 French film *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées* and another in the 1944 film *San Diego, I Love You*.

The real problem with this particular myth is that it has affected how biographers have perceived Keaton—several have looked at that somber stage persona and decided that he must have been an unhappy man, a sad clown. It also contributed to the idea that he must have been abused as a child.

What none of these biographers has taken into account is just what Keaton himself said about his lack of expression: "One of the first things I noticed was that whenever I smiled or let the audience suspect how much I was enjoying myself they didn't seem to laugh as much as usual. I guess people just never do expect





The Three Keatons

any human mop, dishrag, beanbag, or football to be pleased by what is being done to him. At any rate, it was on purpose that I started looking miserable, humiliated, hounded and haunted, bedeviled, bewildered and at my wit's end."

The Great Stone Face was a theatrical contrivance—nothing more, nothing less. It worked for him, and so he continued it. As he developed as a performer, Keaton worked very hard to maintain that public persona whenever he was on stage, in front of cameras, or even when he was being interviewed or having his picture taken by friends. So when biographers Tom Dardis or Marion Meade say (as both do, often) that you can tell Buster was unhappy at a certain time in his life because he looked that way in a photo, they are trying to use a theatrical device to prove a point about his personal life. Won't work. At least not with Keaton.

People who knew Buster best say he laughed and smiled often. Bartine Burkett, Buster's leading lady from *The High Sign* (1920), said in an interview with Kevin Brownlow: "We'd be right in the middle of a take, and he'd think of something funny. He'd ruin the take, and we'd have to do it over again. But he laughed at everything very easily, and it was hard for him to be so solemn, you know."

Eleanor Keaton, Buster's widow, also talked about moments on stage or on live TV when something struck Buster funny. He always turned his face upstage or away from the camera so the public would not see him

smile so the public persona would be maintained.

The biggest problem with this particular myth is that Buster himself created and perpetuated it. In dozens of interviews, as well as in his autobiography, Buster claimed he never smiled when performing. "Then when I'd step on stage or in front of a camera, I couldn't smile. Still can't," he once said.

Just not true. He chose not to smile, and that's not the same thing at all.

Myth: Buster Keaton was the victim of child abuse by his father, Joe Keaton.

The child abuse myth is one of the most persistent and pernicious myths about Buster Keaton. There's no doubt that the family's vaudeville act was a rough one, often called "the roughest act in vaudeville," and Buster was often referred to as the Human Mop.

What do the facts tell us, and what can we conclude from them?

Let's start with the family's act. Sure, it was rough. Buster was

thrown about the stage by his father. But does that necessarily prove that he was a victim of child abuse? Not at all. Even now, there are child performers. I can think of one in particular, a little boy with the Cirque du Soleil whose stock in trade is dangerous-looking acrobatics. Do they get hurt occasionally? Probably. But kids also get hurt riding bicycles, playing in the yard, jumping on beds, and swinging on swings. If a child gets hurt doing any of these things, do we accuse the parents of abuse?

After scanning hundreds of reviews and ads for the family stage act, reading dozens of interviews with Keaton and family friends, I have found references to only two on-stage accidents. And yet the Keatons performed at least twice a day for more than 17 years. Assuming they took three months off in the summer (which sometimes they didn't) and assuming they worked only five days a week (which they didn't), that comes out to a minimum of about 10,000 performances.

Two accidents out of 10,000 would be an injury rate of .002 percent. Not bad.

Some writers have mentioned that Keaton's father was occasionally taken before child labor authorities. Psychologist Alice Miller, who has perpetuated the child abuse myth, says: "When he was only three, Buster Keaton started appearing on the stage with his parents, who were vaudeville performers and helped to make them famous by taking severe abuse in front of an audience without batting an eyelash. The audience would squeal with delight, and by the time the authorities would be ready to intervene because of the physical injuries the little boy sustained, the family would already be performing in another city."

In her indictment, not only has Miller confused performing with reality, she has left out crucial information. The Gerry Society, the child labor authorities, never found any evidence of mistreatment. No broken bones, not even a bruise. If they had, the Keatons would have been yanked off the stage. And although Joe Keaton was occasionally arrest-

ed for allowing his under-aged son to work, after the officials examined Buster, who had to strip naked, the Keatons were let go, or merely fined for allowing Buster to work, which is not the same as finding abuse.

"We used to get arrested every other week—that is, the old man would get arrested," Buster recalled. "Once they took me to the mayor of New York City, into his private office, with the city physicians ... and they stripped me to examine me for broken bones and bruises. Finding none, the mayor gave me permission to work. The next time it happened, the following year, they sent me to Albany, to the governor of the state."

A vaudeville friend, Will "Mush" Rawls, confirmed Buster's version, saying: "...and then Buster would have to go down to the chief of police, pull off his little shirt and pants and show them that he had no bruises or broken legs."

Some writers have gone even further, claiming Joe abused Buster

off stage beginning in his early childhood. Until Buster joined the act, Joe and Myra Keaton were struggling to make a living on the fringes of show business. Almost as soon as Buster started appearing with them, they became a success, soon a big success. Joe Keaton was not a stupid man. Even if you think he might have been jealous of his young son's talent, his family was dependent for its livelihood on Buster's ability to perform. There is no way he would have endangered the fami-

ly's means of making a living or its reputation in the very small world of vaudeville by hurting his star, the family breadwinner.

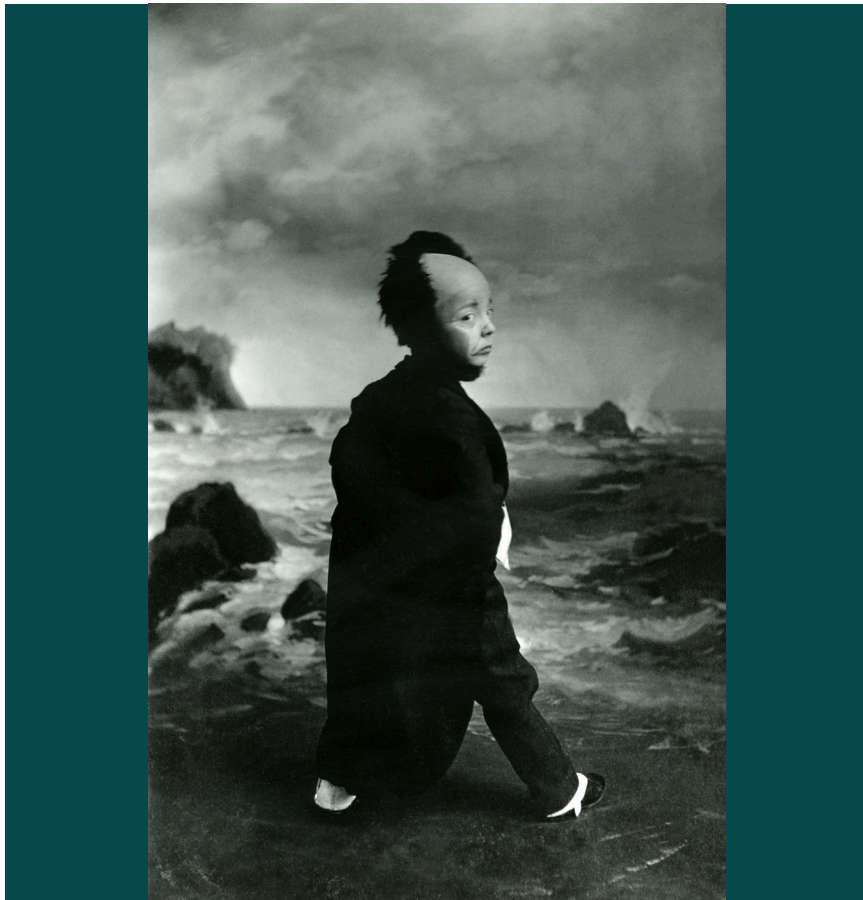
By the time Buster was in his late teens, things changed. Joe's drinking had ruined his on-stage timing and wreaked havoc with his temperament. Buster admits that the family act broke up in 1917 because of Joe's dangerous behavior, which by then did include

elements of abuse. But to take this information that Buster was quite candid about, as some writers have done, mix it up with the roughhouse nature of the act and conclude that Buster's entire childhood was one of severe abuse, is irresponsible. The facts and simple logic just don't support it. These same writers suggest that Buster's claims that he loved the act and loved his father are really examples of repression. Keaton was never shy about discussing the unpleasant aspects of his life—his drinking, his marital troubles, his dislike of MGM. So why can't we take him at his word about his love for his family? Is it because of that stone face? Is it because the cultural myth of the sad clown is so ingrained in us? Is it because we've superimposed the sensibilities of our own time on the 1900s?

Or is it because we'd rather believe the gossip? It makes such a tidy little picture. This poor, abused child who is deprived of love and a normal childhood stops smiling because he hurts so much on the inside but turns his pain into laughter that millions can enjoy. Sounds almost like a bad movie, doesn't it? Come to think of it, it was a bad movie. It was called *The Buster Keaton Story*.

Myth: Buster Keaton was a lifelong alcoholic.

In the 1920s, Keaton seems to have been like many people during Prohibition—a social drinker, even a heavy social drinker on occasion. When his life fell to pieces in the late 1920s-early 1930s, he used alcohol disastrously as an escape from his many problems. His drinking was indeed severe. He went through delirium tremens, which is alcohol withdrawal and eventually was committed to a sanitarium to dry out. For a few years, Keaton was drunk almost constantly. In addition, his father had a serious drinking problem, which had forced Buster to break up the family act. A tendency toward alcoholism is considered an inherited trait.



After battling with it for several years, Keaton quit drinking cold turkey in 1935 and seldom had a problem with it again. For most of the rest of his life, Keaton allowed himself one beer every evening, with no disastrous side effects. I have interviewed many people who knew him well, some who spent months with him on tour during different stage productions, and all agree they saw no evidence of a drinking problem.

The true alcoholic, according to most experts, can never drink without having difficulties. The alcoholic must refrain or suffer the consequences. The experts also agree, however, that some people have episodes of serious drinking triggered by outside circumstances but, and this is an important distinction, that does not make them alcoholics. Keaton apparently fell into this category. His period of acute drinking seems to have lasted for only a few years, probably from 1930-31 to 1935. From then on, he was able to handle his liquor, with only occasional exceptions—exceptions not unlike moments experienced by other social drinkers.

Myth: Buster Keaton was illiterate.

Author Marion Meade started this myth, the newest in the Keaton pantheon, in her 1995 biography. It's an easy one to disprove.

Buster's handwriting was clearly the work of someone who has been taught penmanship in a day when penmanship was a basic part of education. And although Keaton attended only one day of public school, his parents apparently did hire governesses and tutors to teach him on the road.

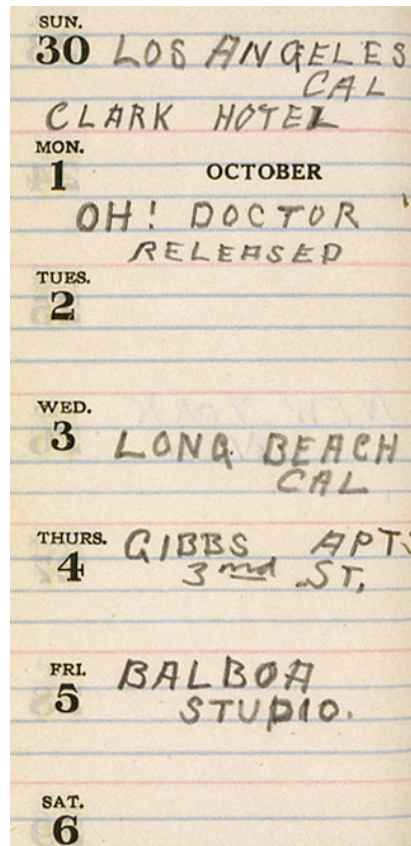
There are countless examples of Keaton's writing. I've seen his date books, which he kept faithfully from 1908, when he was 13, to 1919. In them, he recorded every city and theater in which the Keatons performed during those years. The books are written very neatly and mostly in pen. They include virtually no spelling mistakes—not even a crossed-out word.

When he entered World War I, Keaton was assigned to the signal corps. "I took being a soldier quite seriously," he says in his autobiography, "studied the Morse Code regularly, also map reading and semaphore signaling. On mastering these subjects I discovered that I was the best-informed private in my outfit." His date book for 1919, which is full of Keaton's Morse Code practice, bears him out. It is unlikely the army would have taught Morse Code to someone who could neither read nor write.

In fact, Keaton considered reading one of his hobbies—certainly an unusual hobby for someone supposedly illiterate. His favorite reading was detective/mystery novels, but he also read William Pittenger's *The Great Locomotive Chase*, the historical book that inspired his greatest film, *The General*.

Over the years, Keaton wrote stories, song lyrics and scripts. A brief sample of his writing, the opening scene from a treatment for a possible screenplay called *Flannelfoot*:

"On a drizzly, foggy London night, Mr. Whiteside, a tall man of middle years, turns up the collar of his trench coat and looks appealingly back toward the



From Buster Keaton's personal date book, 1917

doorway of a stately English home. Framed therein is Mrs. Whiteside, who glares at him accusingly, pointing an unforgiving finger. He raises his hands in mute protestation of innocence, but she rejects him with an imperious gesture. He turns and slowly walks into the night. The door to the house slams behind him with a sound of doom."

"FADE OUT."

Pretty good vocabulary and grasp of the English language for someone who was illiterate, no?

Myth: Buster Keaton was financially inept.

In his later years, Keaton turned over his finances to his wife, Eleanor. He seldom carried much cash on him, and seemed to have a naïveté about money that caused people who knew him then to think that he didn't understand financial matters.

It's understandable that people might have believed he was financially inept. For whatever reason, Keaton was careless with his money, but this is another myth not completely supported by the facts.

As early as the age of 13, Buster Keaton kept the financial records for his family's vaudeville act, logging all their expenses and income in his date books. Each ledger is recorded with neat columns of figures, perfectly added in pen.

In the 1920s, he made several investments that should have reaped him major financial rewards. For example, he invested in the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel and the La Brea Tar Pits. But Keaton was unlucky—perhaps it was just a matter of timing. The very same investments that made fortunes for his peers didn't succeed for him. They made money; he lost it.

Keaton was also notoriously generous with his money. He was known as a soft touch, someone who would help anyone in trouble. For many years, he was one of the main financial supports for his friend Roscoe Arbuckle when Arbuckle's career collapsed after the Virginia Rappe manslaughter scandal in 1921.

Few people ever repaid him. One who did was Loyal "Doc" Lucas, who said that when he paid back a loan for a car in the 1950s, Keaton was so startled he could hardly believe it. "Eleanor!" he called to his wife. "I got my money back!" Lucas quoted Eleanor: "She told me later that if he got back even half the money he had loaned out, he would be a very wealthy man. That's how generous he was."

Keaton was simply indifferent to money. He was capable of dealing with it but just not interested. In the 1920s, he had been rich, lived in mansions, had the best clothes and expensive cars. When he lost his wealth, it doesn't seem to have bothered him much. He had always wanted a modest home, which he got in 1957, thanks to his earnings from *The Buster Keaton Story*, and was content with what he had.

In this materialistic age, indifference to money may be hard to fathom, but Keaton was a man who apparently got his sense of satisfaction from the work he did and from his personal life, not from his bank balance, and from knowing that he had enough money to help someone in need.

Myth: Buster Keaton was just another pie-throwing Keystone Kops-type slapstick comic.

As early as 1931, when Keaton appeared with the Keystone Kops in a scene from a charity fund-raising film called *The Stolen Jools*, he allowed people to believe he was just a pie-thrower. Admittedly, he had thrown a couple of pies in a film in early Arbuckle shorts, including his debut, *The Butcher Boy*, but pie-throwing was the least of his talents.

Perhaps because the public seemed to believe it anyway, Keaton traded on this half-truth. In 1939, he threw a pie that accidentally hit Alice Faye in *Hollywood Cavalcade*, and in several live television appearances, he demonstrated the art of pie-throwing. That messy kind of slapstick seemed to be what the public expected, what they thought he had done back in the ancient silent-movie days, and far be it for him to tell them they were wrong. If they wanted pie-throwing, he gave them pie-throwing. Work was work.



Hollywood Cavalcade (1939)

Myth: When he was older, Buster Keaton was often gruff and distant.

Alan Schneider, who directed Keaton in Samuel Beckett's *Film*, remembered meeting with Keaton in a hotel room in New York: "Now and then, Sam [Beckett] or I would try to say something to show some interest in Keaton, or just to keep the non-existent conversation going. It was no use. Keaton would answer in monosyllables and get right back to the Yankees—or was it the Mets?"

Photographer Larry Blumsack, who photographed Keaton in Boston in 1961, recalled: "The session had a chilling solemnity to it. Physically, he was sitting in front of me. He responded to me when I asked him to do something. To this day, as I look at the photographs, I still wonder what distant places Buster Keaton traveled to in his soul as I photographed him."

This is the view of Buster Keaton by people who barely knew him: a remote man who was unresponsive and withdrawn. There were two things about Keaton that these strangers didn't know, but friends and family did.

First, Buster Keaton was terribly, painfully, shy. Unless he was with friends, or in situations that he found comfortable, his shyness caused Keaton great difficulty. His third wife, Eleanor, was at his side almost constantly during their 26 years of marriage; her presence put him more at ease.

Second, Keaton was nearly deaf, especially late in his life. Most of the time Eleanor was on hand to make sure he understood what was being said to him. But when she wasn't nearby, he had to fend for himself, and he was uncomfortable letting people know about his dis-

ability. Rather than tell someone he couldn't hear, Keaton would often attempt to respond to what he thought was being asked. If he just couldn't hear, he would often retreat emotionally or become frustrated and snappish—common reactions among people with hearing problems.

The documentary film *Buster Keaton Rides Again*, filmed concurrently with Gerald Potterton's short subject *The Railrodder* (1965), perfectly illustrates what it was like to work, talk and play with Keaton during this era. He laughs, sings, reminisces, discusses gag construction, details his frustrations, and more. He was clearly a complex individual perfectly capable of expressing himself well. He was many things to many different people.

Myth: Keaton lost his creativity after the silent era.

In later years, Keaton was accused of reaching into a bag of old tricks rather than creating anything new. Instead of coming up with innovative ideas, he preferred to repeat old gags. The flaw in this myth is that Keaton had always repeated gags. A close analysis of his films with Arbuckle and on his own finds material recycled over and over.

For example, there's the famous stunt from *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* in which the front wall of a house falls down around Buster and he escapes being crushed because he's standing exactly within a window opening. Keaton used this gag, and variations on it, at least six times in his silent films, in one of the Arbuckle shorts, in *The Blacksmith*, in *One Week*, and three separate times in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*

Another favorite was the gag of the partially obstructed sign. He used it again and again. Many of his other gags appear over and over throughout his life's work.

The only way to answer the question of whether he lost his creativity in later years is to see what he did that was new and different.

Try the 1936 Educational short *Grand Slam Opera*. In it, he sings, dances, juggles, and creates inventive new routines.

Or his 1934 French film *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées* or the 1939 comedy *Pest From the West*, which are full of unique comedy material.

Or when he worked as a gagman at MGM in the '30s and '40s. Buster was often called in to find unique solutions to plot problems. None of these gags is like anything he had done for film previously.

Or his early television appearances on *The Ed Wynn Show* or *Talk of the Town* (later *The Ed Sullivan Show*), for which he put together brand-new material that had no apparent connection to anything he had done before.

Or some of his many TV commercials, for which he created completely new bits.

What Keaton lost was his creative control. The



Eleanor Keaton and her husband in 1964.

©2020, Gerald Potterton

tragedy for most of us is the dream unrealized. What kind of films would he have made had he been allowed to continue? We don't know because no one would let him do it.

A newly resurfaced lost reel of film, directed by Buster and shot by Eleanor, shows just exactly how creative Keaton could be with just a couple of friends and a 16mm camera. The film, saved from the trash by then stage manager Dale Duffy, and recently restored by Paul E. Gierucki, depicts the supposed "rushes" from a day's filming; it was used for Keaton's stage production of *Merton of the Movies* in 1957.

Myth: Buster Keaton was a sad clown.

Again, it's a tidy picture: the little boy who never smiled, abused by his father on stage and off, who had a miserable life but made millions laugh.

But everyone who knew Buster well, both during his childhood and in his later life, has said he was happy and contented. There's no getting around the fact that he had a bad period—a very bad period—in the early 1930s, during which he lost his job, his money, his home, his



Merton of the Movies (1957)

family and his reputation, and then began to drink heavily, which aggravated his problems. He was not happy then. He was undoubtedly frustrated over losing the creative control he had been used to. But a condensed five-year stretch of misery in a life of 70 years is not too bad in the scheme of things.

Keaton was pragmatic about his career. He had known the ups and downs of show business since childhood, and he was sanguine about the way his career had gone.

Ultimately he married happily, worked constantly, earned almost as much money in the years before his death as he had during his heyday, and continued to receive the adulation of fans. He owned his modest house, raised chickens, grew an orchard, and got together with friends to play cards, tell stories and play the ukulele and sing.

Keaton was a man who got pleasure from simple things: fishing, playing baseball,

building Rube Goldberg-like gadgets, barbecuing, playing with his dog or neighborhood children, finding a four-leaf clover.

Sounds like a pretty good life—one that most of us would be glad to have.

Keaton thought so, too. Here's how he summed up his life: "Because of the way I looked on the stage and screen, the public naturally assumed I felt hopeless and unloved in my personal life. Nothing could be farther from the fact. As long back as I can remember, I have considered myself a fabulously lucky man."

There's no reason not to believe him.

"Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again."
—William Cullen Bryant

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SENNETT SPEAKS

Mack Sennett Knows Whereof He Speaks:

Comedy Isn't Talk - - It's Action

By JACK QUIGG

Associated Press Hollywood Writer

Hollywood — "You ask me how to get laughs?"

"It's simple," said Mack Sennett. "Always keep the comic on the wrong end of the gun."

He chuckled appreciatively. The white-haired dean of comedy film makers was expounding on his favorite subject—film comedy.

If you are any sort of a movie fan at all, you know about and are indebted to Mack Sennett. He's responsible for more guffaws than anyone, comics included, in the moving picture business.

Two generations ago he gave a laugh hungry world stuff to split its sides on: The bungling, ever frustrated Keystone Cops, the flying, face-fitting custard pie and the bathing beauties, whose shocking knee-length costumes opened an era of near-nudity on the beaches that has culminated, he hopes, with today's Bikini suit.

Producers have copied Mack's laugh formulas for 40 years.

The industry's greatest talent discoverer, he gave breaks to Charles Chaplin, Marie Dressler, Wallace Berry, Gloria Swanson, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, Ben Turpin, Harry Langdon, W. C. Fields, Mabel Normand, Hal Roach and Bebe Daniels. He introduced Bing Crosby to the screen.

Sennett hasn't produced a picture for 10 years. Semi-retired, he devotes his time to golf and plans for reissuing some of his old hits. At 66, tanned and husky looking, he could pass for a retired boiler maker, which he is. He left the business at 17 after deciding the entertainment business offered greater rewards.

Over lunch near the Hollywood Boulevard apartment where he has lived for 20 years, I asked him about the novel he had just completed.

"You say to me," he said, brushing the question aside, "Why are westerns always the vogue?"

"Because they have motion—running horses, shooting," he continued.

"They aren't all talk. A baby, an African, an Indian can understand them. Comedy must have the same thing, action."

"Let me tell you," he said, ignoring his hamburger steak,

"how I got the idea for the bathing beauties. (He expresses alarm at today's extreme models.)

"My comics weren't the handsomest fellows to look at and I was having trouble getting editors to print their publicity pictures. But I had noticed that if a girlie got in a traffic accident and was photographed with her skirts a few inches above her knees, she made the front page."

He hired some cuties, posed them so it would be impossible to scissor out the comedian, and promptly began getting space. Putting the babes in movies was a natural sequel. Putting them in bathing suits was a sensation.

"I got a lot of rumbles from women's clubs," Sennett said. "That encouraged me. It meant I was going good."

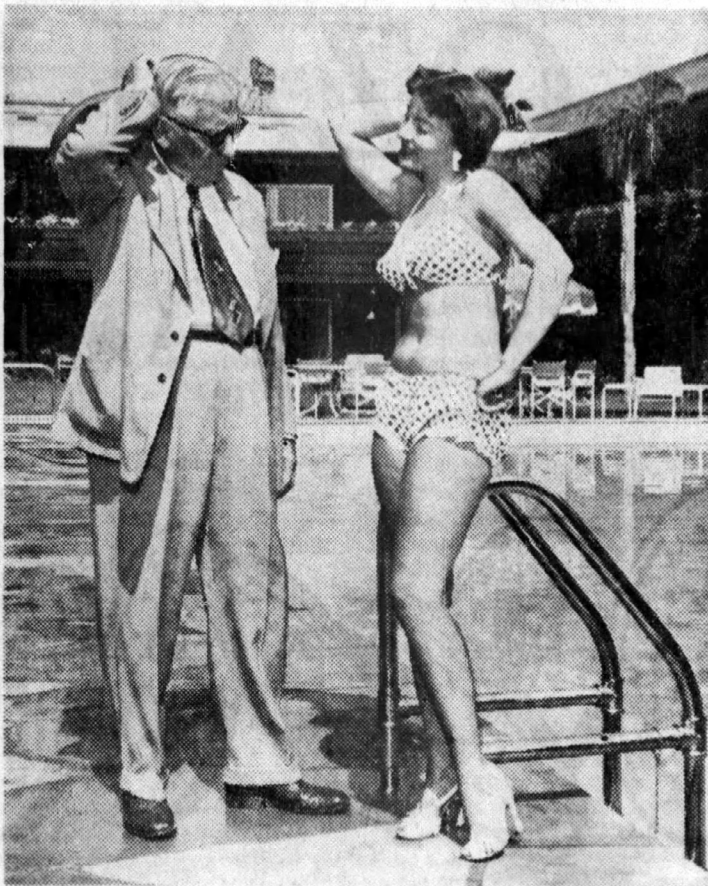
Somebody must have liked the cheesecake pioneers. They made a mint of money. And before long women were shedding their modesty and their bloomers to copy the bathing girls. Beach garb has been getting briefer ever since.

Although Sennett believes comedy today depends too much on gags, at the sacrifice of action, he is unstinting in his praise of today's funnymen.

He described Red Skelton as "gifted," Bob Hope as "very funny" and Jack Benny as a "great artist."

But his three favorites are Chaplin, Fields and Stan Laurel (of Laurel and Hardy).

"They knew the great secret—pantomime. Chaplin, of course, was the master."



MACK SENNETT and Model PAT HALL

The daddy of the film bathing beauty and her cheesecake professes to be alarmed at today's beach garb.

LOST AND FOUND

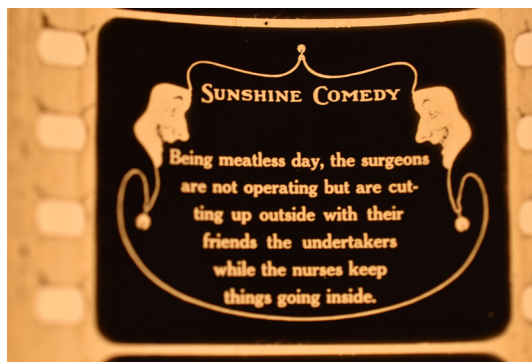
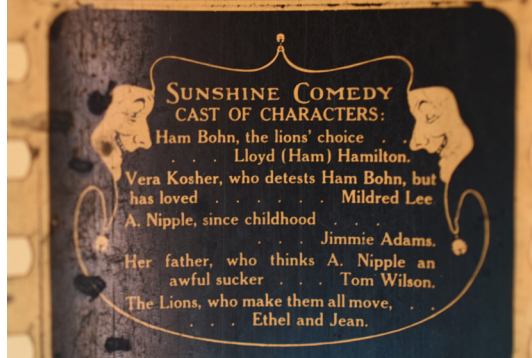
Hungry Lions in a Hospital (1918)

In 2008, historian Paul E. Gierucki recovered a significant portion of a previously thought lost Lloyd Hamilton Fox-Sunshine Comedy titled *Hungry Lions in a Hospital* (1918). The surviving footage was re-premiered at Slapsticon on July 20th, 2008 in Arlington VA

Twelve years later – almost to the day -- private collector Mike Aus spotted Gierucki speaking about film preservation during a live Niles Film Museum Watch Party and generously donated an original 35mm nitrate roll from *Hungry Lions* -- which contains additional footage missing from the first reel!

Gierucki, CineMuseum LLC and Richard M. Roberts are currently collaborating on a full reconstruction of this short subject and shall determine a proper avenue for release when it is completed.

(Watch *Chase! A Tribute to The Keystone Cops* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQXtN-1BYaJo>)



Photographs courtesy of Mike Aus

A GREAT ACT OF KINDNESS

As Witnessed by Marie Behar



Marie Behar

*Introduction by William Malin,
Harlequin — Masquers Club of Hollywood*

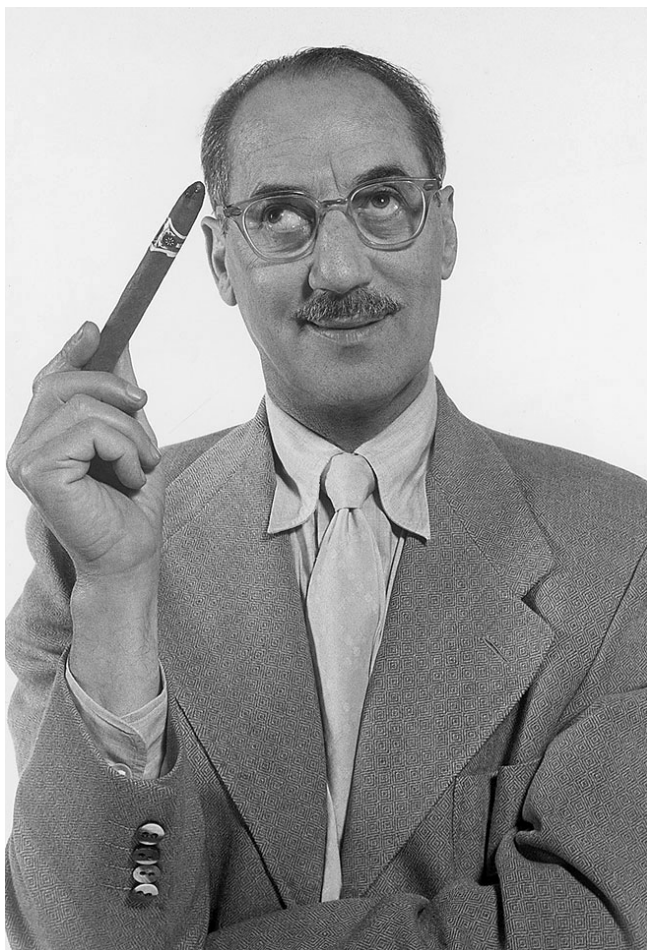
In August, we lost a staunch and beloved member of our community; that special group of people whose love of Old Hollywood runs too deep to describe. Movie's Golden Age is our Shangri-La. As it was for my late friend, and fellow Masquer, Marie Behar, whose own career in entertainment had some shining moments, not the least of which is her childhood bit part in *The Ten Commandments*. How many of us can say we were directed by Cecil B. DeMille? I'm guessing not many more than she on planet Earth. That is until August 31, 2020, when Marie Behar was taken from us by cancer.

I had dozens of conversations with Marie over the years. We never met in person. She lived in the UK, and I in the US. About half the time we chatted by telephone. She loved talking on the telephone. I'm going to share a story that she shared with me in 2012, during one of our wonderful long chats.

Many times I urged her to write a book filled with vignettes like the one below. I convey this story because Marie herself no longer can, her stories are important, and it is the only story I know well enough to do some justice to.

As you may know, Marie grew up in a prominent entertainment family (her uncle was Sol M. Wurtzel, for starters) and lived next door to Groucho Marx. One day, the housekeeper in Marie's house, who sent money home every week, barely missed the postal pick-up. She wasn't worried because she knew of another way to post her envelope of obscured cash, and she began walking to the nearest mailbox. It was getting late in the day, the sun was going down, and she was about halfway to her destination when, as a pedestrian, The Beverly Hills police stopped her.

The housekeeper was African-American and the time was the mid-1950s. Groucho Marx, who was driving home at that very moment, saw the police harassing someone he personally knew, pulled his car over and engaged with the officers. "What are you guys doing giving a hard time to my housekeeper?" "Oh you know her Mr. Marx?" The potential custody scenario quickly ended, and Groucho escorted the young lady back to Marie's house, having convinced the unenlightened cops that she was okay. At the time, the only person home was Marie herself. She witnessed a lot of this from her bedroom window, later joining Groucho and her housekeeper in the kitchen while they all sat together and discussed what had happened. The rest of the family eventually came home and were brought up to speed about the Injustice that was done, and the beautiful deeds of Groucho Marx.



Groucho Marx





COMING SOON

In the next issue of
Comique:

An interview with author and historian RANDY SKRETVEDT

Sam Gill's MUSINGS - HOLLYWOOD: A FABLED LAND

W.C. Fields and THE FAMILY FORD

PIRATE OR PALADIN? The Real RAYMOND ROHAUER

CHARLIE CHAPLIN'S OWN STORY Revisited

MALICE IN THE PALACE: Curly Howard's Final Film Appearance

Plus:

THE RETRO BOOK REVIEW

IN THEIR OWN WRITE - LETTERS FROM HOLLYWOOD

LOST & FOUND

and much, much more!



Please Share!

**Help Name this Triple Landmark Location
in Silent Comedy Film History!**

Chaplin-Keaton-Lloyd Alley

Prototype alley street sign design by noted Dutch graphic artist – Piet Schreuders.



Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921)



Buster Keaton's *Cops* (1922)



Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!* (1923)

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Three of the greatest comedies of all time, Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921), Buster Keaton's *Cops* (1922), and Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!* (1923), were filmed in the heart of Hollywood at a nameless pedestrian alley south of Hollywood Boulevard. With each movie inducted into the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress as a "work of enduring importance to American culture," the alley represents a six-way constellation of stars and iconic films absolutely unique in Hollywood history.

Naming this site the "Chaplin Keaton Lloyd Alley" will honor the legacy of these great filmmakers, generate publicity and goodwill, and create an internationally admired Hollywood tourist attraction. Fans, critics, and scholars from across the country and around the world already pay tribute to this landmark.

From its opening title "A picture with a smile – and perhaps, a tear," Charlie Chaplin's highly personal masterpiece *The Kid* blends sentiment and comedy with echoes from his impoverished London childhood. Young Jackie Coogan became a star portraying the kid Chaplin raises during the film. The alley appears frequently, first when an infant is abandoned, and later as Charlie finds him and hilariously attempts to foist him onto others, all under the watchful eye of a suspicious cop.

Dubbed "The Great Stone Face," Buster Keaton was also a great comedian, stuntman, and director. Catapulting over fences and grabbing passing cars one-handed, Keaton flees an army of angry police across early Hollywood during his meticulously constructed short film *Cops*. Keaton filmed eight movies at or near the alley.

Popular and prolific, Harold Lloyd sold more movie tickets during the 1920s than any other comedian. Following many scenes at the alley and nearby, his climb up a downtown skyscraper in *Safety Last!*, staged without computer-generated effects, continues to thrill audiences today. This image of Harold hanging from a clock remains one of the most celebrated in all of movie history.

100 years later, we can still walk in their footsteps, where movie magic was made. Early developers named the streets, but who put Hollywood on the map? Naming this humble alley for Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd will honor not only three of cinema's comedic geniuses, but the birth and heart of Hollywood itself, creating a timeless landmark. So please, let's return the favor and put them on the map by naming this the "Chaplin Keaton Lloyd Alley."